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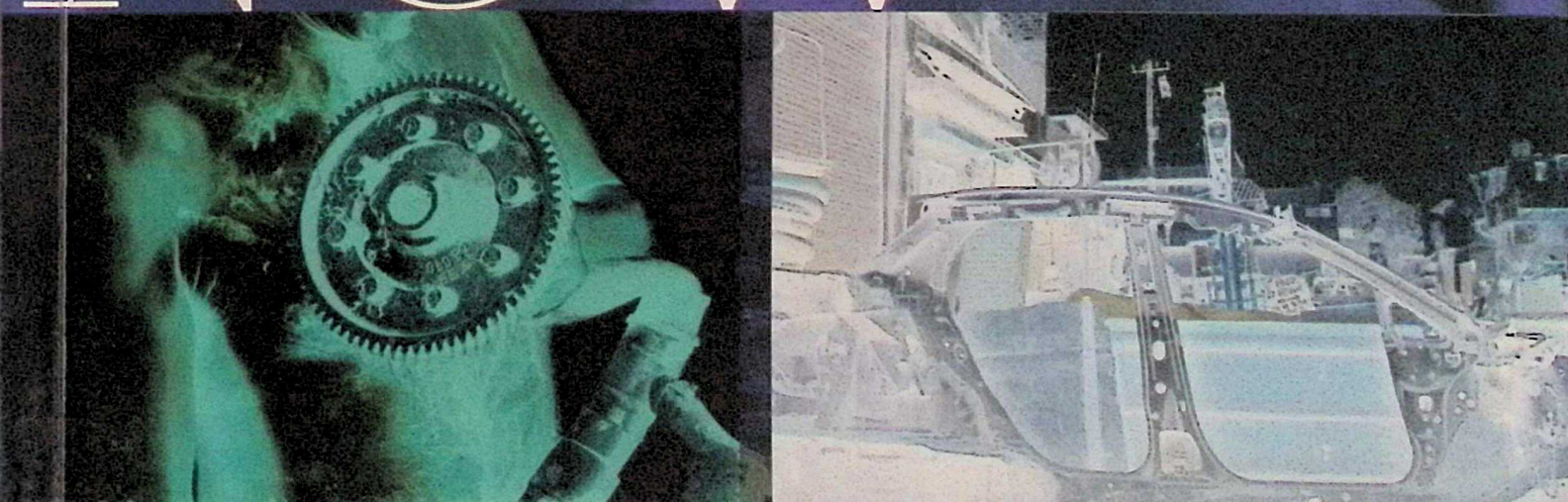
MARG

A MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2018 ₹350

DOCUMENTARY NOW



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The Urban Lens Film Festival

Film posters for the 2016 Urban Lens Festival:
1
I Am Yet To See Delhi (Maine Dilli Nahin Dekha), Humaira Bilkis, 2015.
2
My Mother India, Safina Uberoi, 2002.

All images in this writeup and the thematic ad-portfolio are courtesy Subasri Krishnan.

FROM THE FIRST NON-FICTION FILM *WORKERS LEAVING THE FACTORY* MADE BY THE Lumière Brothers in 1895, cities have shaped the cinematic imagination, and the growth of cinema as a form has deep ties to the industrial revolution and urbanization. Cities keep mutating and cinema in many ways has responded to this change, through ideas and aesthetics. The Urban Lens Film Festival, curated by the Indian Institute for Human Settlement (IIHS), Bengaluru, was set up to bring into the public domain a complex set of questions. How does one understand cinematic representations of a city, over a long period of history? How does the construction of time and space in cinema provide insight into the complex nature of what cities can be? How do we understand films about and set in cities of past times in the present? How does film practice create new forms of knowledge and ways of seeing?

The film festival was established so that practitioners and audiences can actively participate in creating a new language of conversation around the films they create and view, especially from countries in South Asia and the Global South. The industrialized First World or Global North has so far been the benchmark for the discipline of urban studies. And this has shaped the public imagination of cities in various cultural expressions, including cinema. But the truth is that countries in Latin America, Africa and South Asia have always had strong cinematic traditions coming from different storytelling heritages and formal practices. They confound/challenge stereotypes of what Third World cities are supposed to be, excavating distinctive features of urban life and imagination. The curation

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of the festival has always paid attention to this fact. So no matter which genre of film is being screened, the programming asks certain fundamental questions time and again—what are the minutiae of urban life in different cities, and what new forms of narrative emerge that make us reflect on the idea of cinema itself.

Festival programming is not restricted to the screening of films made in the not-too-distant past, as is common with most festivals. While exhibition of recent and innovative work provides audiences with the excitement of encountering the new, it leaves the task of creating a deeper discourse around films to film academics and historians disseminated in the limited domain of academic conferences. This sphere has tended to separate out from the possibilities films offer through broader public viewing and conversations. The Urban Lens Festival addresses the question of how one reconciles the worlds of film practice and theory while recognizing that each has its own place. This is why conversations around films are a very important feature of the festival which has over the years tried to create a space for film practitioners and artists to have a dialogue amongst themselves and with a larger public about the relationship between aesthetics, ideas and urban life.

While the first few editions of the festival mostly featured non-fiction films, in 2017 fiction films were introduced into the programme. This is because while "fiction" and "non-fiction" are categories that offer a starting point for understanding certain cinematic histories and formal impulses, filmmakers have always complicated the distinction. Non-fiction filmmakers have always used tropes of fiction, and vice versa. And yet there is hardly any conversation amongst practitioners, scholars and a film-going public to explore how fiction and non-fiction practices are two sides of the same coin, and emerge from shared histories.

By creating a space that is as much about discourse as it is about viewing, it is our hope that the Urban Lens Film Festival will open up conversations around city and cinema, and cultivate a different imagination about the possibilities of the urban and of cinema in the public domain.

SUBASRI KRISHNAN

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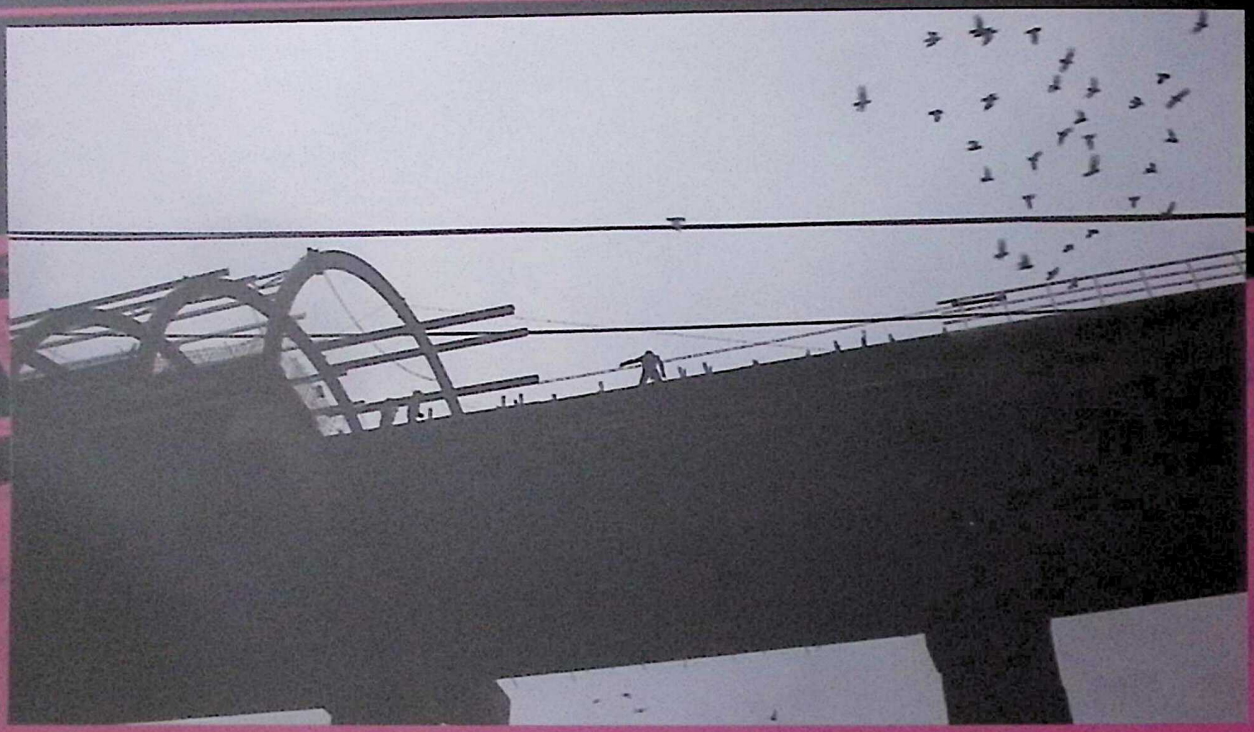

Distance, Yashaswini B.R. and Ekta M., 2013.

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Komşu Komşu, Huu! (Hey Neighbour!), Bingöl Elmas, 2015.

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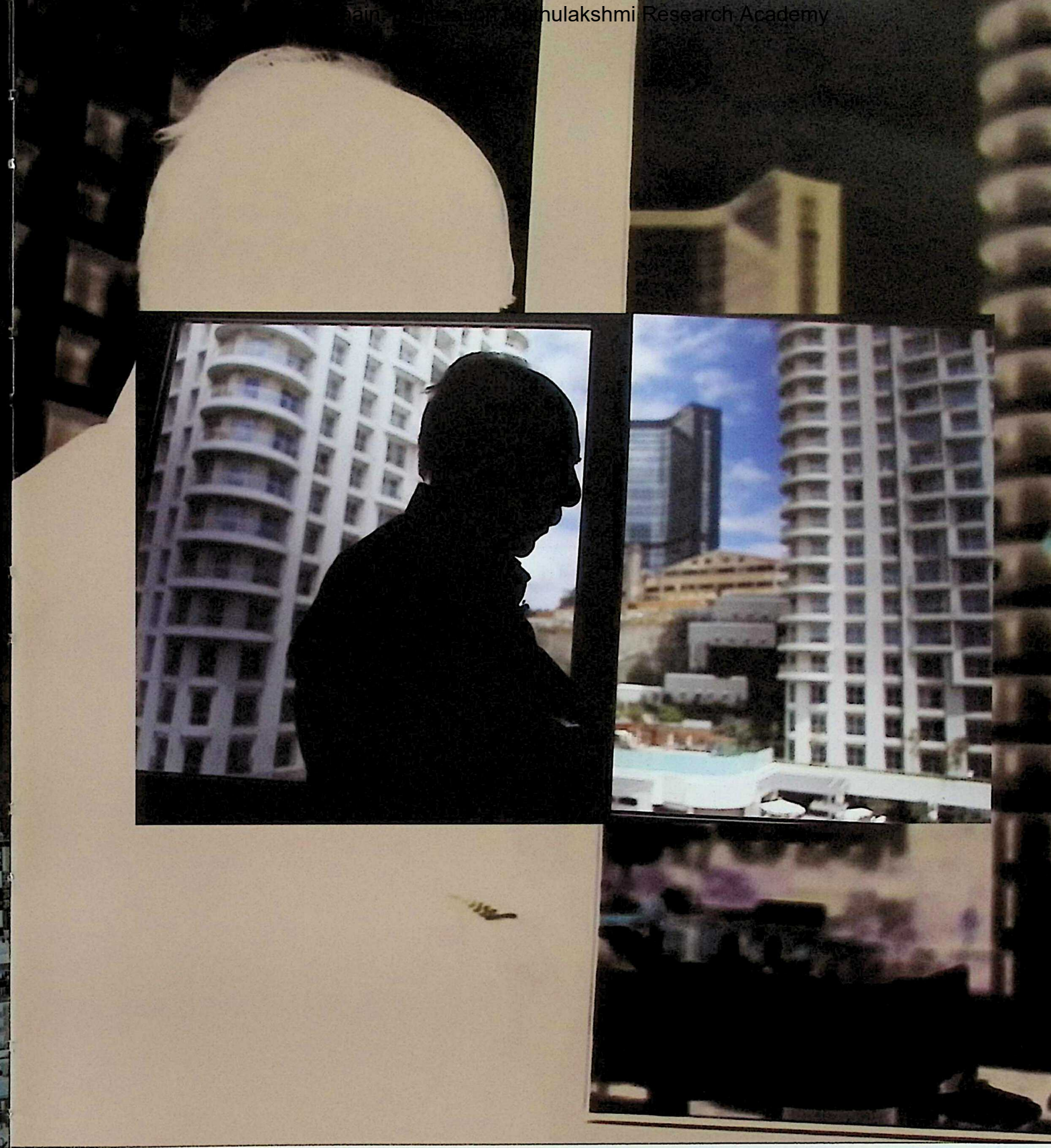

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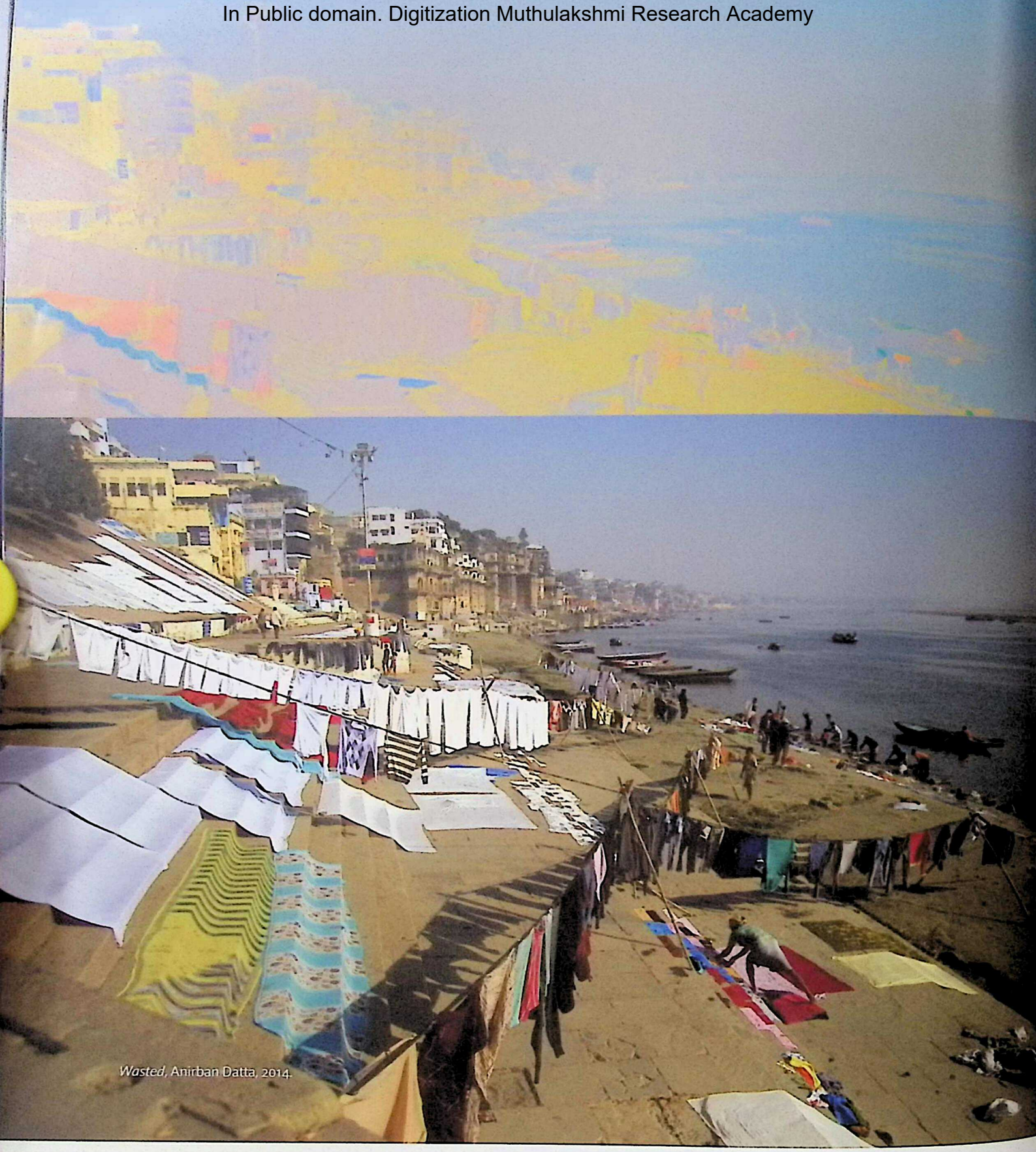

Wasted, Anirban Datta, 2014.

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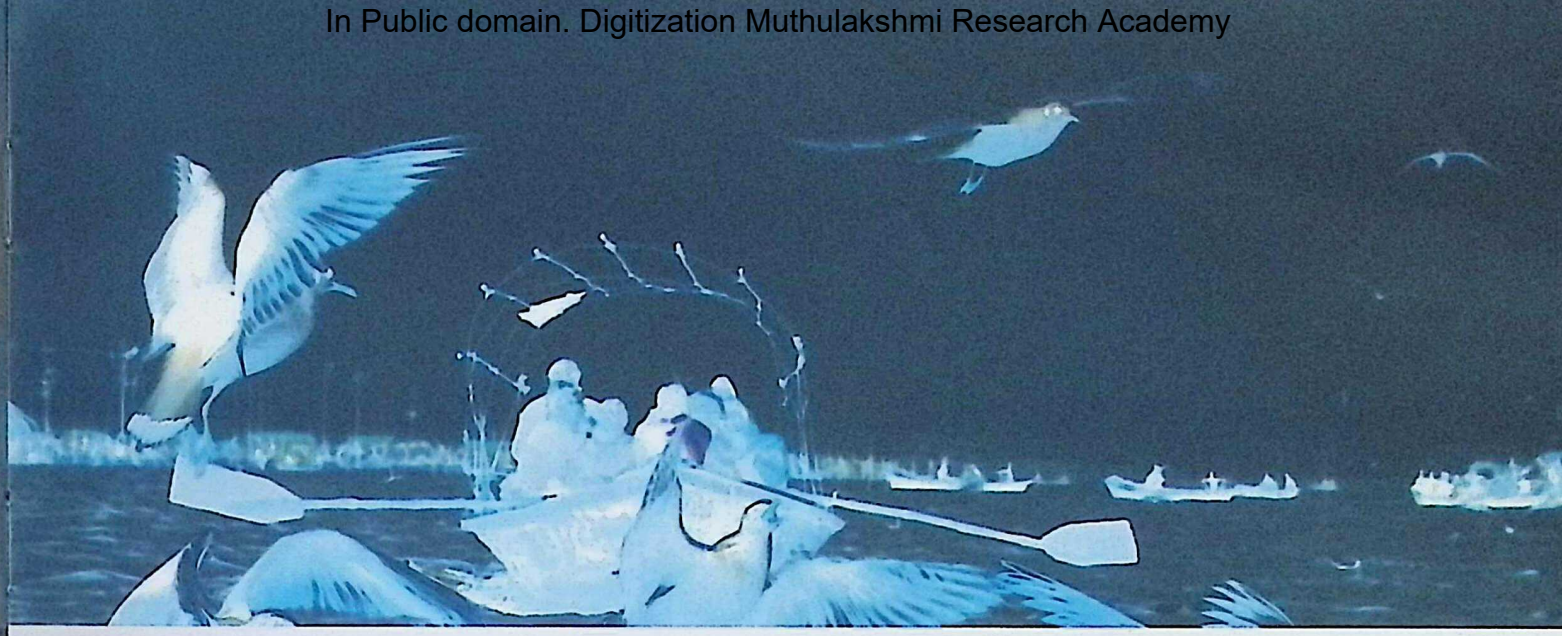

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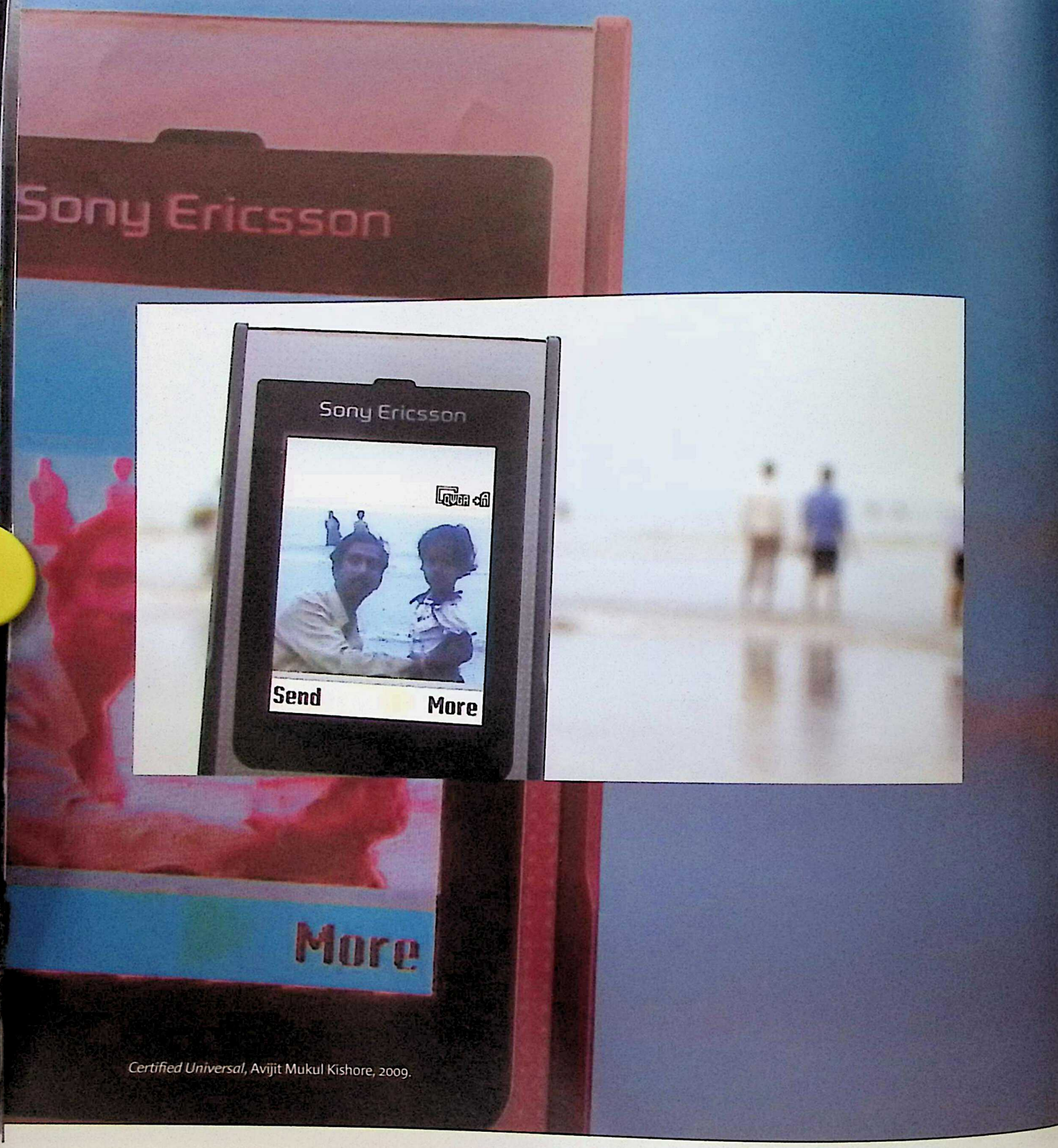

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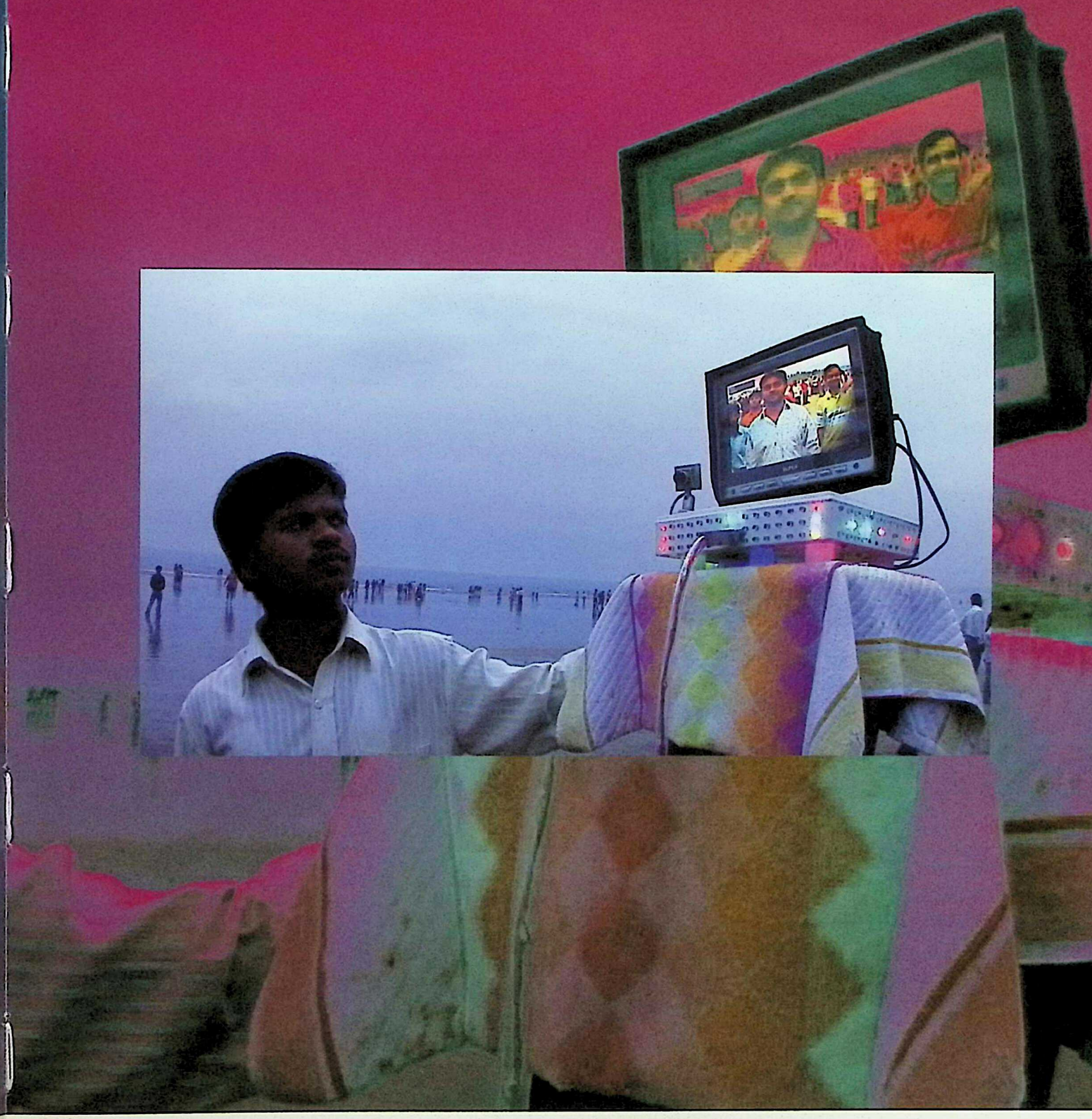

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Still from *Certified Universal*, Avijit Mukul Kishore, 2009. Courtesy Avijit Mukul Kishore.

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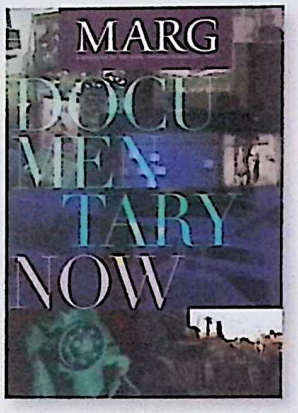

EDITORIAL NOTE

Marg last published an issue on documentary films in 1960. In an essay there, Mohan Bhavnani, then Chief Producer at the Films Division, came to the conclusion that "...for all practical purposes, the pure documentary is dead". The intervening decades have borne out a completely different trajectory: documentary filmmaking has evolved and expanded with time and technology—whether through analogue film, the portability of video or the almost dematerialized pixels of the digital.

Bhavnani described the documentary as a film whose purpose was to bring "the true conditions...in their unvarnished perspective...it should be able to create a true story around everyday life and existence and the problems that confront us. In other words, the pure documentary is a realistic film based on facts...without in any sense a white-washing of the subject." It is somewhat amusing to read this now; our understanding of documentary films has been redefined in the last few decades, not only as a result of evolving technologies of making but also due to massively mutated socio-political conditions. The notion of "pure" documentary has rightly come under question—not least because of an acknowledgement of filmmakers' subjectivity and the recognition of the impact the camera has on the "reality" that it records.

Documentary Now looks at documentaries through the lenses of changing mediums, funding, viewership, restoration, archiving and pedagogy, along with the concerns voiced by key practitioners from the 1980s till today. Challenges that independent documentary-makers continue to face include the lack of financial support and avenues for exhibiting films beyond the occasional film festival or specially curated series at cultural venues such as museums. There is also an increasing interference by the state through censorship and bans. However radical changes in technology—both with recording devices and the game-changing dissemination enabled by the internet—mean that films can be more easily produced, released and viewed online without the older obstacles of censor certificates, cinema bookings etc. The dispersion of moving image recordings via easily accessible platforms such as mobile phones has complicated the idea of the documentary or the recorded moment as "truth" or "fact". How do we approach, deal with, analyse the surfeit of image-data in the current time? What is its relationship with fact? How do we read images as proof of an event or lived experience in an age where the moving image is so easily doctored and manipulated? Or, indeed, where a moving image can be instantly made "viral"?

Since the early 1930s, when the first film recordings were made to cover major political events in the country, the documentary form has undergone dramatic transformations. Through this issue and in the future, Marg hopes to interrogate the changing modes of image-making and the power that the audio-visual medium still wields in societies across the world.

Latika Gupta

Inside front cover and pages 1–9: Thematic ad-portfolio on the Urban Lens Film Festival, by Subasri Krishnan

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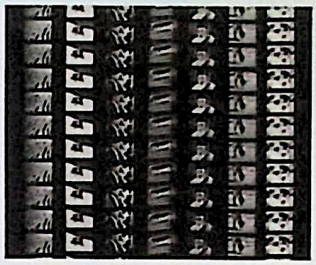

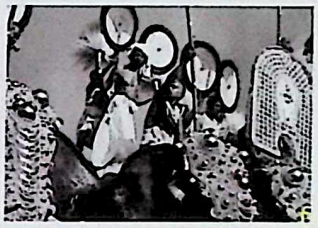

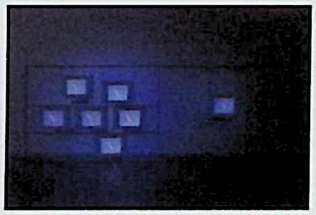

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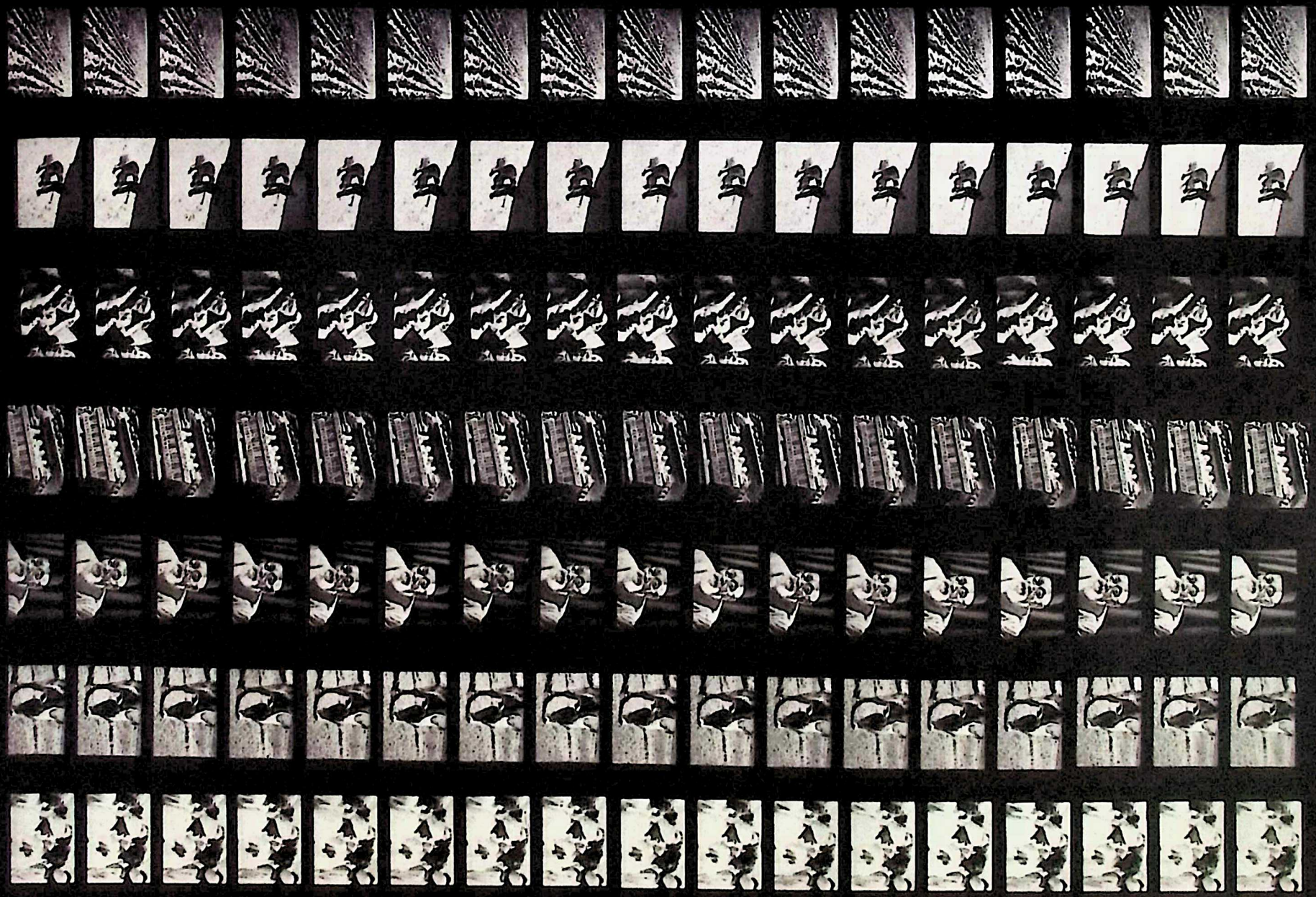
Introduction

RAVI VASUDEVAN

1 and 2
Pages from the *Marg* archives: *Documentary Films of India*, Vol. 13, No. 3, June 1960.

MARG HAS A HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP TO THE DOCUMENTARY, AS PART OF A modernist moment with multiple parallels and confluences. The magazine was born in 1946 and grew alongside a discourse about the importance of the documentary in the post-independence period, involving important journals such as *Indian Documentary* (1949–50, 1955–59) and institutional forms such as the Film Society (1943 Bombay, 1947 Calcutta) and the International Film Festival (1952). A special issue of *Marg* titled *Documentary Films of India* was published in 1960 which included articles by key filmmakers and documentary ideologues of the time, including Mohan Bhavnani, A. Bhaskar Rao, B.D. Garga, Homi Sethna and Paul Zils, and featured short invited pieces by John Grierson, James Beveridge and Paul Rotha. It included an editorial by Mulk Raj Anand who also wrote for *Indian Documentary*. It is appropriate that a journal with a historical investment in exploring the aesthetic forms of modern life should once again be the venue for what the documentary means today.

The idea of a special issue now poses interesting challenges, of a historical as well as a contemporary sort. We are currently privileged to see a flowering of independent documentary and a bid to recover documentary histories in complex ways. Documentary as we understand it today has great ambition inscribed in it, involving the recovery of key "experimentalists" of the 1960s such as S.N.S. Shastri, Sukhdev and Pramod Pati, and a rich body of contemporary work, from Mani Kaul, Anand Patwardhan, Nilita Vachani and Deepa Dhanraj to Sanjay Kak, K.P. Sasi, Amar Kanwar, Rahul Roy, Lalit Vachani, Manjira Dutta, Ranjan Palit, Surabhi Sharma, V. Ramani, Paromita Vohra, Ruchir Joshi, the Raqs Media Collective, CAMP, Soudhamini, and many others.[1] Documentary has also entered the domain of installation art, often within a transnational constellation of dialogues and curatorial initiative. Schools for the training of documentary filmmakers, as part of a media training syllabus, are proliferating beyond well-known institutions such as Jamia Millia's Mass Communication Research Centre or Mumbai's Tata Institute for Social Sciences. And the Public Service Broadcasting Trust has since 2000 supported a substantial corpus of documentary works. In addition to formal institutional training and funding, the possibilities in the contemporary of self-trained documentarists making an impact emerges in films such as Abhay Kumar's *Placebo* (2016), an exploration of alienation and suicide at the country's premier medical school.



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BOUNTY FROM BUNDS

While there is a need to capture the longer history of documentary forms, our focus in this volume is on the contemporary history of the documentary and of the documentary archive. By contemporary history, we largely refer to the proliferation of documentary practice on the basis of video technologies from the 1980s, though our authors also consider the persistence of celluloid. Celluloid constitutes an imaginary horizon, a material referent in digital restoration, an archival object and object of personal and collective memory. As Avijit Mukul Kishore notes, even with the advent of high-resolution Sony digital cameras, celluloid continued to be the perceptual yardstick for video; and Shohini Ghosh points out that for a long time, video was considered inferior, and it took major struggles to have it recognized as a legitimate medium for festivals and awards. Celluloid now carries both the challenge of historical distance and the potentiality of an aesthetic engagement informed by a distinctive awareness of the material forms of media. Thus, experimental filmmakers' and artists' cinema, as in the case of the Experimenta festival documented here by Anuja Jain, puts a particular value on working with celluloid, and on the context of projection, in its bid to curate a very specific archive.

For a long time, the documentary archive was overwhelmed by the presence of the Films Division (FD), the Indian government's filmmaking unit, even if an array of so-called independents were also making films, and in the 1950s formed an association to further their interests, the Indian Documentary Producers' Association.[2] These were film professionals who sought various avenues of work, in publicity, propaganda, instruction and advertising, from government, business houses, in educational film, and so on. They were independent because they were not part of government, and had to seek the limited opportunities offered by the Films Division awarding a small number of contracts to "outside producers", the conduit to screening an "approved film" in cinema theatres. While the work produced by these film companies is of considerable interest, they were very much part of the nation-building exercise. Independence today assumes a critical outlook on government, state development projects and mainstream political parties, for how they aggressively marginalize and displace peoples and destroy environments. And it may take us entirely away from such concerns into a varied encounter with life-forms and practices, as Shohini Ghosh outlines.

Whatever the problems of state documentary practices, in recent times it has provided material for historical reflection, not only for what it tells us about official policy, but also for its mapping of people, things, environments. In recent times, thanks to the initiative of FD director-general, V.S. Kundu, and filmmaker-curators Surabhi Sharma, Avijit Mukul Kishore and many others, the Films Division facilitated a curatorial space through its programme FD Zone, showing material from the FD archive alongside contemporary independent cinema. The uses of the FD archive are highlighted in Priya Jaikumar's analysis of travel films for the encouragement of tourism in the 1970s. Jaikumar draws attention to a pedagogy for how

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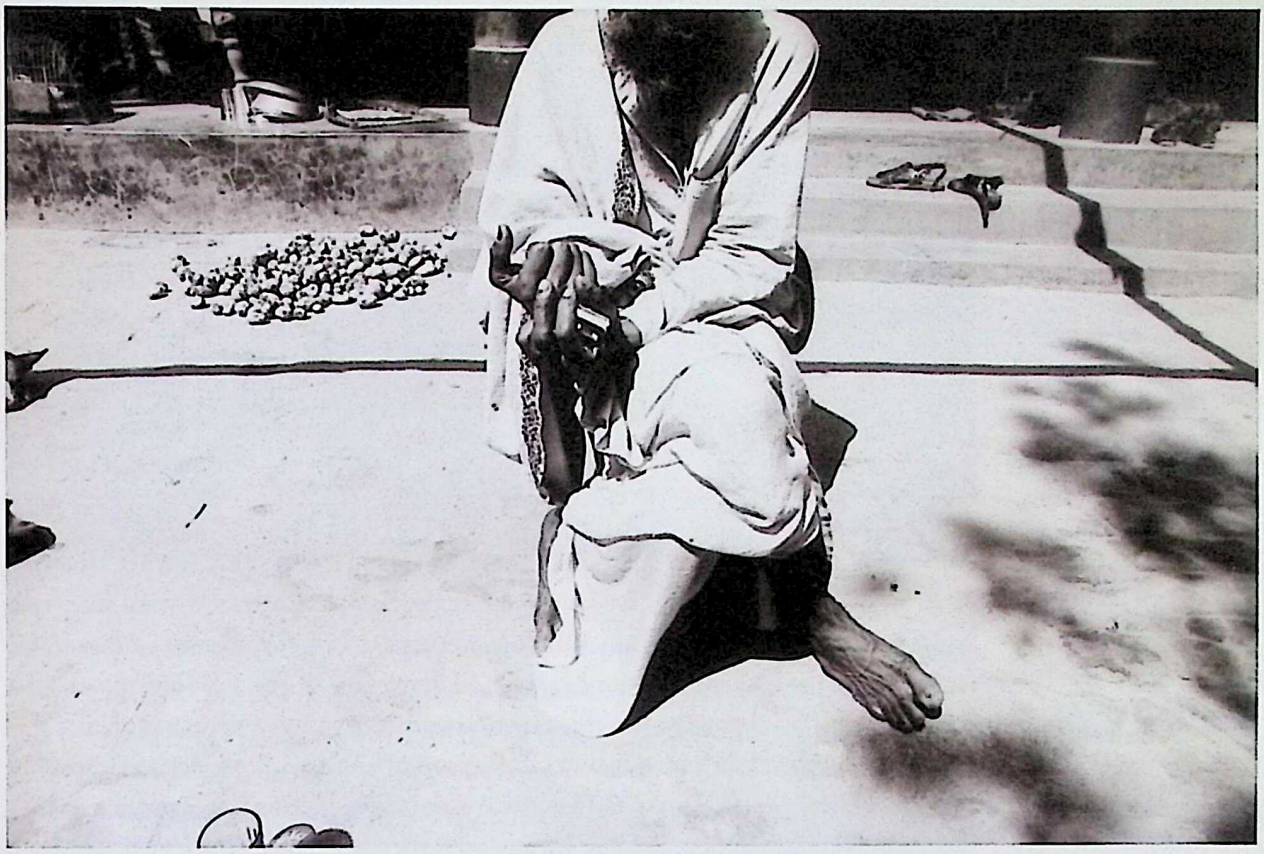

3
Production still from *Egaro Mile/Eleven Miles*, Ruchir Joshi, 1991.

Indians must reform their conduct to encourage visitors, highlighting a precursor moment for the Indian government's current bid to solicit foreign investment. She also identifies a specific object, a German Rollei camera and an advertisement for ORWO, film stock imported from East Germany, gesturing to a specific network of trade and technological linkages with Eastern Europe.

If the FD archives here provide us with information about the object world, they are also a potential database of the elemental world. Veena Hariharan rightly contrasts FD's instrumental relationship to water, as something to be controlled for power, irrigation and so on, to the environmentally aware contemporary documentary. Her approach echoes Adrian Ivakhiv's argument for a film theory alert to the question of ecology. He suggests that while key features of cinematic convention seek to produce the distinction between the human and the non-human, as in Giorgio Agamben's formulation about the anthropology machine, media form may skew the distinction by a variety of techniques.[3] It is possible that the FD database, fatally implicated as it was in a suborning of the natural world, may still yield startling ways of placing the human figure and framing the natural world.[4]

Time itself is held in the material form of celluloid, what Ruchir Joshi calls its "hiss and scratch". We get this sense at many points in this archive of the contemporary. There is Joshi's own return to *Egaro Mile*, his 1991 film about Baul folk-singers, shot in the mode of an anti-ethnographic film, unsettling the boundaries of identity by immersing us in performance and ironic reflection. Joshi encounters the film as it is being restored by the Arsenal archive in Berlin, the process weaving a to-and-fro in time, as images, sounds and scenes captured then are worked over in the technical embrace of the digital, and the bid for sensory calibration with the textures of the original. The image of women activists gathered around a low-res video file taken from a scratched 16mm print of *Tambakoo Chaakila Oob*

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Ali (Tobacco Embers, 1982) is a striking historical encounter. The Yugantar collective's film, involving women tobacco workers in a re-enactment of their strike, acquires new momentum as there are eager requests for a copy of the film. Nicole Wolf captures the phenomenology of this contemporary moment, and uses it as an invitation to speculate whether the archive of feminist filmmaking could metabolize and forge a chemistry with the lineaments of contemporary political desires. Or is there a break, where the sheer energy and will of the past is acknowledged, only to understand that something else is required in the present: something to engage the capacities of distributed media practice to capture new renderings of selves, work environments, publics and politics?

For Rahul Roy documentary practice is composed of time as ontologically unstable material. He argues that rather than indexicality, the photo-chemical imprinting of things in the world onto film, documentary renders a world in continuous transition, capturing incremental shifts in people, things, environments, and in the filmmakers themselves. He even argues that there is no question of inducing a subject to re-enact earlier moments because they are existentially no longer the same. Surabhi Sharma is wary that such exploratory ways of doing documentary are undermined by the sponsor's demand for coherent focus on a character, their biographical development, and the development of a progressive narrative arc. For her too, experiments with senses of time and memory, as these extend beyond the individual to others, provide a key axis for the displacement of predictable tropes. She points to the use of the long-take, for example, as something which demands a holding of attention beyond any overt narrative motivation. One is reminded of Ranjan Palit's camera holding the temporal duration of Baul performance in *Egaro Mile*, drawing us into the rhythms of a particular condition of being.

There is a suggestive constellation of imaginations about documentary form, ethics and the nature of the documentary subject in these statements. Roy looks to the temporality of the subject; Deepa Dhanraj (a member of Yugantar) discovers, asserts and seeks the active participation of subjects in their collective form; Amar Kanwar explores how the document may be composed of a mutating and mutually contagious register of expressive materials, including dreams and illusions, poetry, pamphlets, or pamphlets which are poetry (and sometimes, we fear, the reverse). When we see the stills assembled by the directors from their work, we get an impression of the material qualities of existence—the dust of the tobacco factory, workers atop towering compost heaps, a heavy mechanical part weighing into and becoming perforce part of the body of a worker, a still body laid down by the side of a lake, a face on a street by night, pallid, luminous, wraith-like, a wrestler's body streaked with earth—and we see these as evidence, facts and details, but in a way which lifts them into an expressive and affective register. At other points, we do not know exactly what we are looking at, as for example when the Desire Machine Collective presents photographs of an installation in an abandoned house in Kashmir: windows open on an impossible juxtaposition of views, creating a spatial montage for a location which the camera discloses to be that of a ruined interior. In these images, photograph stands in for film, the still capturing of a moment in time. This transfer of media relates not only to the constraints involved in relocating cinema to the printed text you now hold in your hands; it is also, of course, a choice, about what can capture and stand in for something else which is phenomenologically different. The reverse may occur, as when Pallavi Paul reads Ravi Agarwal's photographs for their sensory extension, into noise and smoke and sweat.

Teachers, who are in this case also practitioners, describe this shift into the experimental, the expressive and imaginative with existential urgency. Shohini Ghosh and Sameera Jain

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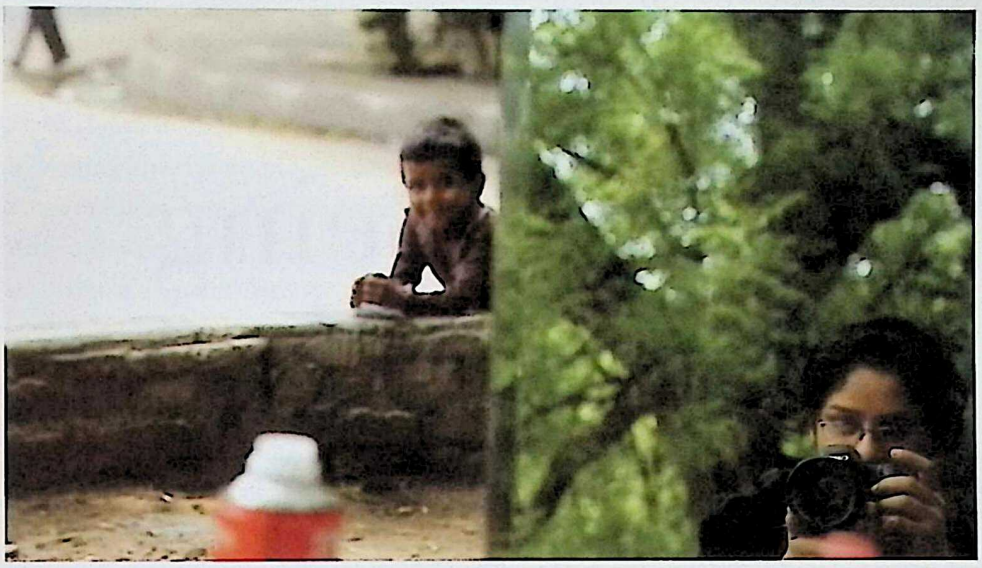

4
Still from *I Am Yet To See Delhi* (Maine Dilli Nahin Dekha), Humaira Bilkis, 2015.

speak of an unlearning of conventions, in themselves and their students, in a way that is personal and motivational: how to unsettle boundaries, fact and fiction, dream and reality; how to engage texture and detail; how to open oneself to other disciplines in storytelling, performance, histories of visuality. The awareness here is not only of the need to motivate and learn from the innovations that a new generation of creativity bring to light, but also to engage an increasingly fraught environment. If we may note that an independent documentary sensibility has taken the danger of environmental degradation as one of its key topics, what we are now witness to is the way media itself constitutes an environment, penetrating deeply what it means to see, to hear, to feel, to think, to experience time and register the nature of space, to live. This is not just about the unparalleled unravelling of journalism, dramatized most brutally by 24-hour television news. It is the fact that media and life are inextricably linked, and a logistics of access, of the possibility of distributed media production and heightened circulation, poses new potentialities and challenges. Kanwar speaks eloquently about the embracing of doubt. Here, media itself is the source of a different order of doubt, as an excess of images and the possibilities of their manipulation place us in a new setting. Exploring different moments in the history of the sting video, Ishita Tiwary and Shaunak Sen capture the shift into a perilous zone in which truth, its technologies and its evidentiary techniques constitute a new sense of an environment of heightened visibility and radical opaqueness, a sense of exhilaration and dread.

NOTES

1 For a very helpful overview of contemporary documentary practice, see K.P. Jayasankar and Anjali Monteiro, *A Fly in the Curry: Independent Documentary Film in India* (Delhi: Sage, 2015).

2 Jag Mohan, "Panorama of the Private Sector of the Indian Short Film Industry", *Marg*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (June 1960): 9–13.

3 Adrian Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2013); and "Green Film Criticism and Its Futures", *ISLE*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (July 2008).

4 Ina Blom points out that early experimental video took the capture of the movement of water as a specific object for video to braid with and explore as elemental autobiography. Ina Blom, "Video Water, Video Life, Video Sociality", in Ina Blom, Trund Londemo and Eivind Rossaak, *Memory in Motion: Archives, Technology and the Social* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), pp. 153–82.

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A Way of Being in the World

SHOHINI GHOSH IN CONVERSATION WITH RAVI VASUDEVAN

RV: What are the main impressions of your experience in film school, the Mass Communication Research Centre, in the early 1980s? I'm particularly interested in the vision of the founders and how documentary emerged as a special focus.

SG: I had just finished my bachelors at Lady Shri Ram College when a classmate told me that she had heard someone talk about this new institute in Jamia Millia Islamia that seemed to address all my interests. At the time I was trying to decide whether I should be a journalist or a filmmaker. The Mass Communication Research Centre (MCRC) in Jamia, where I now teach, did turn out to be the right place for me. The three founding parents, Anwar Jamal Kidwai, James and Margaret Beveridge, left the most profound impact on me—albeit in different ways. Kidwai was a dynamic and fearless visionary who established MCRC in collaboration with York University, Toronto, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). CIDA provided MCRC with a range of sophisticated production equipment while York University provided the first generation of teachers. The team from York was led by Jim Beveridge, a distinguished documentary filmmaker and a close associate of John Grierson, founder of the National Film Board of Canada. It was Beveridge, who had worked closely with the Burmah-Shell Film Company and Films Division in India, who opened out the possibilities of the documentary film for me. Margaret, his wife, was a talented and highly regarded editor.

A.J. Kidwai, after whom the Centre is now named, envisioned MCRC as providing an intensive and integrated media education that would enable students to develop their individual expertise and skills within a secular and collaborative working environment. He wanted to build an institute where students would think with their heads and work with their hands. MCRC introduced us to a range of subjects which included media appreciation, radio, still photography, 16mm film, video and television production. Kidwai felt that since the students of the FTII ended up working in the film industry, the graduates of Jamia should be encouraged to be creative and thoughtful dissenters who would use media to change the world around them. Therefore while students were free to experiment with fiction, it was documentary that was seen to hold the most promise for MCRC's aspirations.

RV: What sense did you have at the time of documentary as a form? Did you manage to see a wide variety of films? Was there a particular model of filmmaking cultivated in the classroom?

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SG: Remember, this was the time before the internet, piracy or the easy circulation of films. We had a paper in media appreciation. Very often we discussed film classics that were never shown in class. However, Kidwai and the Beveridges were very quick to catch hold of visiting filmmakers and get them to screen their films for us. Consequently, we met a range of filmmakers. One filmmaker who came to show his film and changed our lives was Anand Patwardhan. His *Bombay, Hamara Shaher* was tremendous—and left a deep impact on many of us, particularly for those of us who went on to form the Mediastorm collective.

While we were students at MCRC, the International Film Festival in Delhi had, with the help of the Beveridges I think, curated a section on documentary and animation films from the National Film Board of Canada. We saw a wide range of films including the works of animator Ishu Patel. It was a fascinating experience. The influence of Grierson was evident in the way we were taught documentary filmmaking but Jim Beveridge was not a pedantic Griersonian. When I was making my graduation film (on Moochwala, a cartoon-strip character created by the very talented Ajit Ninan Mathew) I worked very closely with Jim and he taught me to pay attention to the smallest of sensory detail—the sound of paper crumpling, for instance, or the dripping of water from a tap or the texture of someone's hand. He frequently referred to films like *Night Mail* and *Song of Ceylon,* the more poetic endeavours that Grierson never much liked. Jim had a lyrical and poetic sensibility around documentary films. For him documentary was never just about the big things but the small things. He made me realize that documentary was not just a vehicle for social messages but an art form.

RV: You came into the field during a major transition. What was it like, the feel of moving between celluloid and video? Many who started with celluloid stayed with it, but I think your generation embraced video.

SG: What was remarkable about MCRC was that we were taught to shoot on both 16mm film and video. For video production we worked on U-matic Low band which, according to contemporary standards of portability, was a huge and bulky monster. The tape itself was the size and weight of a hardbound book! Yet, it was lighter and more portable than 16mm film equipment. The immediate playback—for which we had to carry a monitor—

1
Anwar Jamal Kidwai (right) and Habeeb Kidwai (left) in the early 1990s. Courtesy Shohini Ghosh. Habeeb Kidwai succeeded Anwar Jamal Kidwai as the Director of the Mass Communication Research Centre in Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi.

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2
The Mediastorm collective shooting L.K. Advani's rath yatra in Old Delhi in 1991. Photograph: Shohini Ghosh.

was an added bonus. Video's immediacy and portability seemed perfect for documentaries. Happily, one didn't have to be a big bulky man in order to lift the camera. But at the time, video had an inferior status and those who worked on it were seen to be a notch lower in the filmmaking hierarchy. Video documentaries were not accepted in many film festivals while extremely tedious documentaries were—simply because they were produced on celluloid. Video was a powerful weapon in the hands of women. They could run off and shoot without relying on men to literally do the heavy-lifting!

Even among the most politically progressive film professionals, sexism was rampant. When Sabeena Gadihoke—long-time friend, colleague and co-founder of Mediastorm collective—started doing camerawork for the educational films produced at MCRC, the regular "cameramen" staged a protest. They felt she would compromise the high professional standards they had set! It would have been funny except that they were serious. The inimitable Kidwai, who always encouraged women to push boundaries, quelled the protest in no time. Today, nobody bats an eyelid when a woman picks up the camera. This of course is not to suggest that sexism is by any means dead. It's just that certain practices have become more acceptable.

RV: Tell us about Mediastorm, the collective you were part of in the 1980s, and the experience of seeing Mediastorm films today, after their restoration.

SG: The Mediastorm films emerged from a particular moment in history. We formed the collective in 1985 when we were final-year students of MCRC. The forming of Mediastorm was accidental and was a fallout of the controversy around the Muslim Women's Bill, following the now famous Shah Bano Judgement. The Supreme Court ruled that Shah Bano would have to be provided maintenance by her ex-husband with an upper limit of Rs 500 a month. The order itself was not unusual except for the judgement's needless observations about the religion. The Muslim orthodoxy reacted with cries of religion in danger, and the Congress government responded to this crisis by reversing its stand on the judgement, supporting an alternative Bill which left the divorced Muslim woman, particularly the poor Muslim woman, stranded and at the mercy of men.

Eight of us women students got together and decided to make a documentary on the

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debate. We felt it was important to engage with this moment using the video technology that had empowered us at MCRC. The tentative permission to make this a student film was withdrawn when the university was pulled into the vortex of the controversy. Kidwai informed us that while Jamia would not be able to support the film, it was important to make; so he would help us make it independently. Among others, he asked well-known wildlife filmmaker Mike Pandey for help, and Mike generously let us use his technical facilities. We also started a frantic fund-raising drive and approached like-minded individuals. The first to make a donation was Sage India publisher Tejeshwar Singh. Thanks to the generosity of many—their names appear in the credits—we made the film and showed it to a packed auditorium on September 14, 1986.

Mediastorm went on to make *From the Burning Embers* (1987) on the so-called "sati" of Roop Kanwar. Then came *Kiska Dharm, Kiska Desh: Whose Country Is It Anyway?* (1991), our most difficult and ambitious project. We wanted to track the rise of the Hindu right wing and the deepening communal divide in the country by forces unleashed by the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. It is for this film that we travelled the most—we went to Bhagalpur, Ahmedabad, Bombay, Faizabad, Lucknow and Ayodhya. One leg of the shooting covered the bricklaying ceremony at the Babri Masjid and L.K. Advani's rath yatra which had wreaked havoc across north India. This was our most widely circulated documentary and won us the Chameli Devi Jain Award in 1991 for outstanding work among women media professionals.

Despite all this, we were beginning to understand the shortcomings of the particular form we had chosen for our documentaries. Many of our political assertions—that Dalits, workers and women would rise against Hindutva together—proved to be wrong. The films seemed too polemical, too replete with certitudes. Much of the work we all did later emerged from a critique of our own work. Consequently, we left the films behind—quite literally. For years, we could not find the master tapes and had no copies—or desire—to share. Till 2017 when artist and filmmaker Shaina Anand persuaded us to hunt out our copies and curated the three films as part of MAMI 2017. It is when we watched the films in MAMI, after so many years and with a completely different generation of filmmakers and film viewers, that we understood their value—both political and archival. It is entirely due to Shaina's perseverance and effort to digitize them that the Mediastorm films have been restored and returned to life!

RV: You have often remarked to me that the 1990s brought about a basic shift in your understanding of what documentary film could be. What were the key films, film traditions and filmmakers who gave you this new sense of potential, both internationally and locally? How would you describe this change?

SG: Between completing one master's from Jamia and starting another at Cornell University, I worked as a producer of educational films for the UGC countrywide classroom. In 12 months I made 12 films that looked woefully similar. I needed a creative breakthrough. That came in the form of Jean Rouch's *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) which was screened as part of our documentary class in Cornell. The cinematic explorations of the film along with the filmmakers' polemical engagement with issues of the "real" and representation pulled me out of the bottomless pit I had fallen into. It provided me new insights into the complex interconnections between the domain of lived experience and the world of representation.

In 1989, I came back to India to write my master's dissertation. Luckily for me, Rouch had come to India for the Festival of France. Along with my colleagues Sabeena Gadihoke

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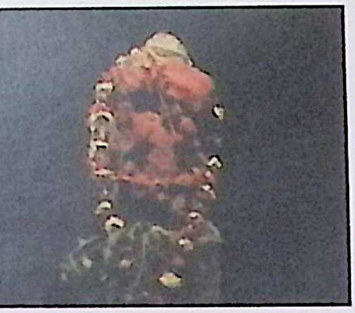

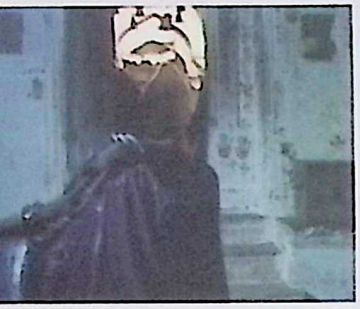

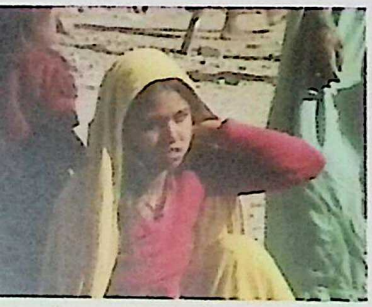

and Sabina Kidwai, I decided to shoot a long interview with him. The organizers hosted him at a hotel on the outskirts of Delhi and generously offered to put us up there. However, they said that we would have to negotiate the shooting of the interview directly with him and run the risk of being turned down! Rouch was known to be a man of unpredictable temperament. We took a chance, moved into the hotel, introduced ourselves and sought an interview. Rouch seemed genuinely moved by our interest in his work. For the next two days we shot a long and detailed interview, parts of which were excerpted to make a documentary titled *Jean Rouch: A Retrospective*.[1]

After I completed my master's I taught a semester at Cornell every year for five years. This was personally educative, and also made it possible for me to bring a wide range of documentary and experimental films on VHS tapes to show my students at MCRC. I could present them a completely different canon. This was the time—the early '90s—when rumblings of discontent were becoming audible. Observational cinema had become too prescriptive, and seemed unable to engage the intangibles of our lives. The indexical bond to the referent was no longer adequate. This was the time that filmmakers were working to return subjectivity to the documentary and were experimenting with innovative narrative strategies in order to gather evidence that had no visible presence in the material world—like memory, fantasy, fear, anxiety and desire. Films like Errol Morris' *Thin Blue Line* (1988), first mentioned to me by independent documentary filmmaker Manjira Datta, and Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* (1987) were daring experiments in returning subjectivity to the documentary. Both films suggested that "truth" and "reality" are not self-evident. Morris' *Thin Blue Line*, and his dramatic declaration that cinema vérité (by which he actually meant Direct Cinema) had "pushed back documentary filmmaking by several decades" was like a call for liberation. This is certainly not to discredit all observational films. One of my personal favourites of all time is Nilita Vachani's *Eyes of Stone* (1990) and to this day, I still find the films of Jean Rouch and David McDougall riveting.

During the late 1980s and the early '90s I started working in an area of abiding personal interest—issues of gender and sexuality. At this time documentaries on sexuality were at the forefront of experiments with style and narrative strategy. These included films like *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, 1989), *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives* (Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman, 1992) and the audacious *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, 1996). I was quite fascinated by the films of Pratibha Parmar whose *Khush* (1991) circulated widely among newly emergent queer social and cultural networks. With *Khush*, South Asian gays and lesbians came out and spoke for the first time on prime-time television in the UK. Someone brought a VHS tape of *Khush* to India and it travelled from home to home where we watched the film on our VCRs. Her other films—*Memory Pictures* (1989), *Flesh and Paper* (1990), *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* (1992)—explored the pleasures and dangers of queer erotica as they intersected with issues of race, class and disability. Later in 1999 I was deeply moved by Nishit Saran's "coming out" film, *Summer in My Veins*. Tragically, Nishit died in a car crash. I treasure the VHS copy he gave me.

RV: You have now been teaching filmmaking for almost 30 years. What has changed in the teaching of documentary filmmaking? I'm thinking here of

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changes in technical equipment, the exercises used to impart filmmaking techniques and skills, the nature of student projects.

SG: Media production courses all over the world have had to deal with the dramatic transition from the analogue to the digital. MCRC is no different. The division of Video and Film is no longer tenable so we have evolved a course called Digital Media Arts (DMA) that deals with different technical and creative aspects of digital storytelling. The transition into DMA was done through several workshops with York University, the same university that collaborated to co-found MCRC. Ali Kazmi and John Greyson, who are media practitioners and teachers, helped us set up the new course. DMA requires us to engage with newer media ecologies, rapidly changing technologies and work-flows. This will have to be the new approach to teaching because the media ecology will continue to change rapidly.

In DMA we continue to do one exercise in 16mm so that the students know what analogue processes entail. Thereafter, they learn to work with a range of digital cameras and post-production equipment. But whatever the equipment, we continue to lay emphasis on imagination and creativity. The DMA students are encouraged to do fiction, documentary and hybrid films. Some of our students have done the most extraordinary work in hybrid filmmaking. We try not to have students think in binaries of fiction and non-fiction. The emphasis is as much on social intervention as on formal experimentation. We have always taught documentary filmmaking by framing it against larger historical and theoretical debates on the documentary. Unlearning the common-sense idea—that documentary is a non-pleasurable but socially relevant bitter pill—is the first step to learning about the expansiveness of the form. In the classroom we draw attention to documentary's long-standing connection with avant-gardism and experimental filmmaking.

I think documentary filmmaking should be central to media production courses regardless of what the student pursues in the future. This is because it's an invaluable pedagogical tool. The process of making a documentary film—especially with institutional constraints and deadlines—is a tremendous disciplining exercise. For the most part, a documentary can never be entirely pre-scripted, it compels students to be alert and on their feet. They have to constantly deal with the unpredictable and the unexpected. They have to innovate, adapt and forge ahead. They have to keep scripting and structuring till the very end. The experience—which can be nerve-racking at times—leaves the student energized, even confident about being in the world. Many of our students who have gone on to make feature films frequently refer to the lessons they learnt as documentary filmmakers. Those who acquire experience in making documentaries are rarely daunted by the challenges the world throws at them because documentary filmmaking is a vibrant and intense way of being in the world.

Most importantly, because documentaries deal with human subjects, its practitioners have tended to debate the ethics of representing and engaging with actual people. The documentary practitioner has always tended to be more alive to ethical issues than say, journalists. At a time when worst practices are proliferating in mainstream media, these debates have become more significant than ever before.

3–8
Stills from *Eyes of Stone*, Nilita Vachani, 1990. The film deals with spirit possession and healing in a remote village in Rajasthan.

NOTE

1 *Jean Rouch: A Retrospective—Parts I & II*, In Conversation with Shohini Ghosh, An AJK Mass Communication Research Centre Production, 1990. Producer: Sabeena Gadihoke.

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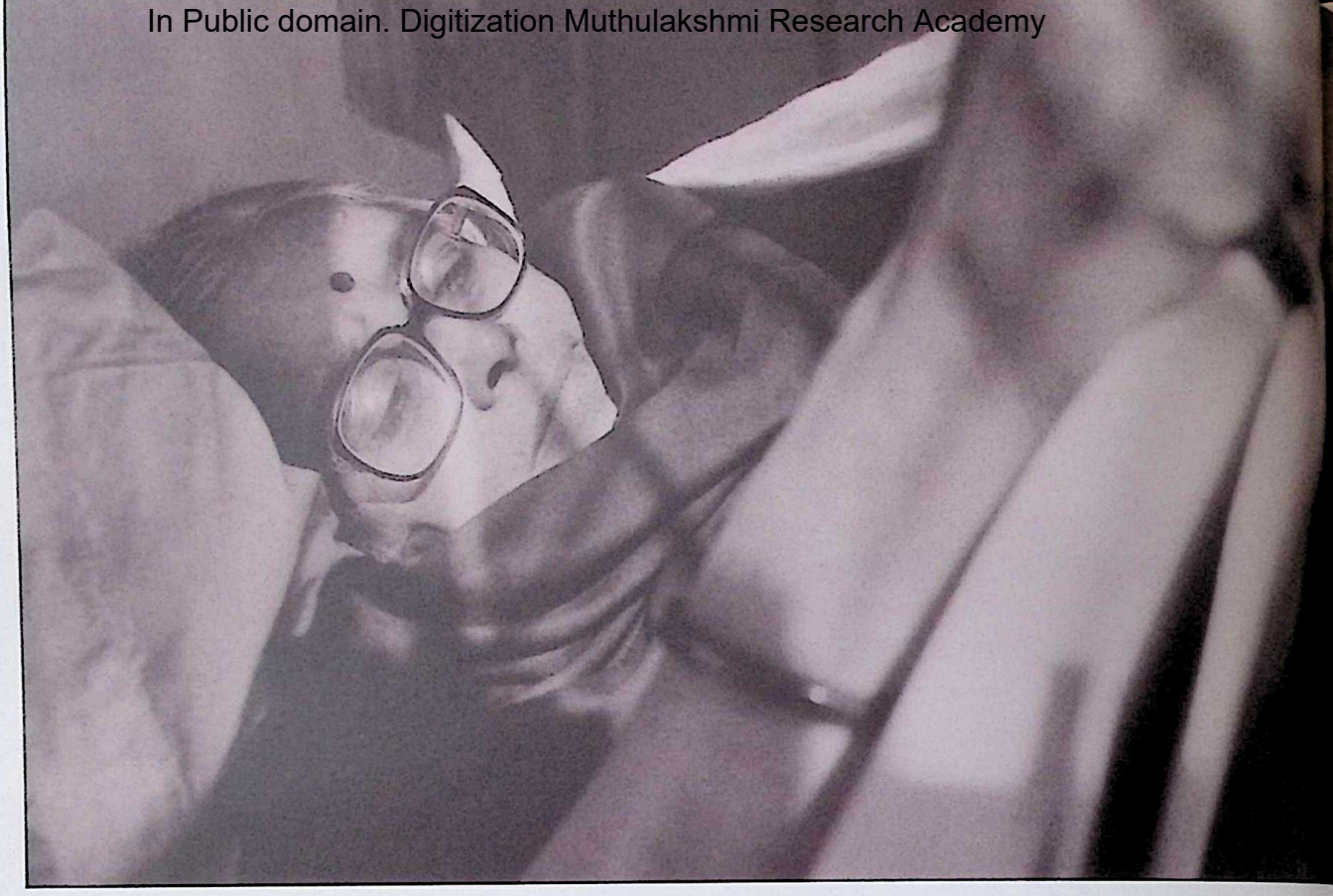

RECORD, REPLAY: Imaging Technology and the Post-Digital Representation of the Real

AVIJIT MUKUL KISHORE

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1 and 2
Close-ups of the author's mother taken with a 35mm still camera (black-and-white) and a Sony DV VX1000 DV camera (colour, from *Snapshots from a Family Album*, 2004). The perspective in the 35mm image is closer to the way the eye sees it while the DV image is wider and somewhat distorted.

All images in this essay are by the author.

As film professionals, we have lived through the phenomenon termed the "digital revolution" in imaging technology and production. It arrived precisely halfway through the 1990s and significantly altered our professional lives, uniting us in new coalitions, as also dividing us in disagreement over whether it indeed was a revolution that liberated us, or fascism that came to dictate how we practice our craft. These terms were heard in the ensuing discourse and the truth, as always, was "rarely pure and never simple", to quote Oscar Wilde. The said digital revolution has now settled into a state of studied composure, like a young adult who looks and feels like its parent—35mm film; secretly looking at it for reference and inspiration. There is good reason for that, both technologically and artistically.

As a documentary practitioner, I have had a continual preoccupation with the conventions that constitute the "cinematic image", the representation of the "real", and the given set of image-making tools that are an integral part of the act of making these. This article will look at the factors that define the way our films have looked and the bearing digital technology has had on the documentary in the first two decades of its common use. We will examine the early phases of DV (the video format, generically named Digital Video) and the family of Digital SLR video cameras, to see how the point of reference always remained 35mm film for the imaging industry. This phenomenon carries with it an interesting anachronism. In the 1980s, 35mm film ceased to be the dominant medium of production for non-fiction works with the movement away from the state-produced documentary. Celluloid went into near-total decline with its discontinuation as the medium of exhibition in the first decade of the 21st century. Why then does 35mm film continue to remain the reference standard for motion pictures and photography in general? There are multiple factors at play here.

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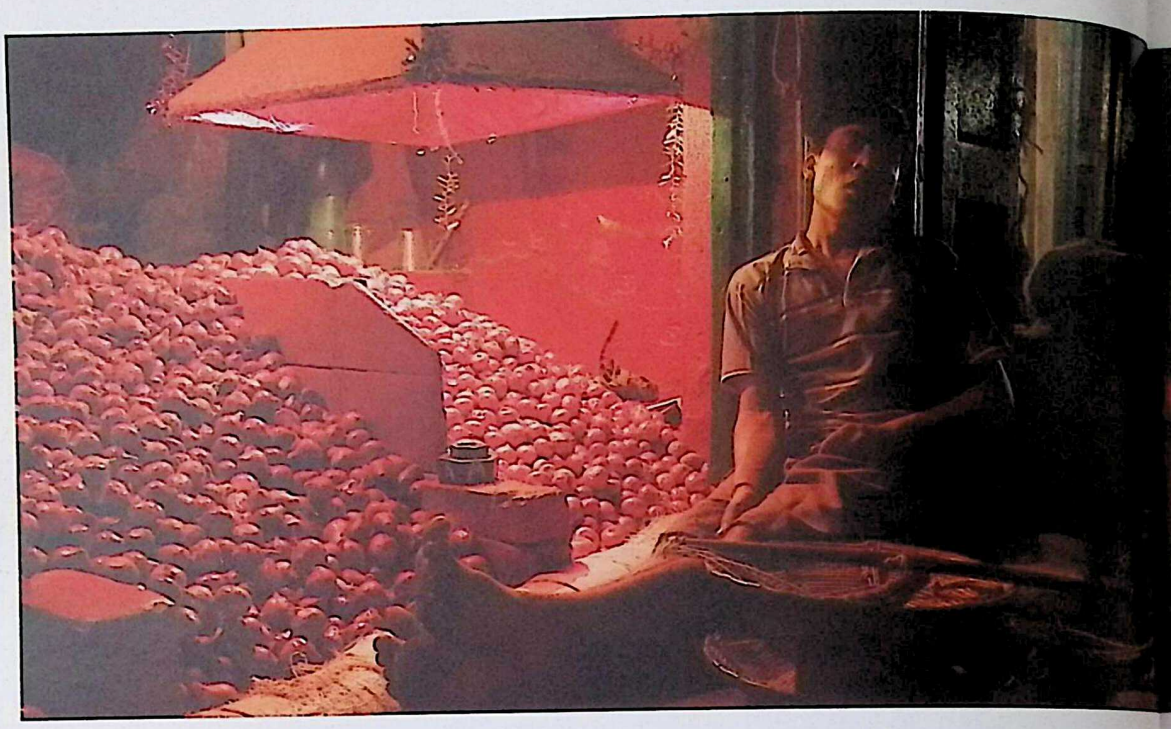

3 and 4
The same space shot with a full-frame DSLR and a prosumer video camera. Notice the perspective difference. The tonal and resolution differences are the subject of much discussion and beyond the scope of this article.

The Mini DV Tape

It was in 1995 that Sony launched the VX1000 Mini DV camera. Independent documentary filmmakers had been working with 16mm film, or analogue video formats like U-matic or Betacam at this point. The Sony VX1000 (and a family of similar cameras) and the PD150 that followed about five years later, were brought into the prosumer camera market with a clear strategy to break into the independent documentary and industrial video market. Major critical and commercial validation for this technology came from the films of the Dogma 95 movement, especially Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen* (Denmark, 1998) and Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (Denmark, 2000), both of which were shot with Sony Mini DV cameras and transferred to film for theatrical release. At the same time, there was Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project* (USA, 1999) shot on a Sony VX1000. All these films were technically fiction films, but had the mandate of looking "real" and spontaneous, like documentary. They achieved this in different ways, referencing diverse non-fiction film languages. *Festen* was made like a home video, set against a large family celebration where a dark secret is revealed. *Dancer in the Dark* had the conceit of working with the accidental image, by not actively framing the actors, but rigging arrays of cameras following their paths (a failed experiment, according to Lars von Trier). *The Blair Witch Project* used the desaturated and grainy DV image to tell the tale of a group of student filmmakers who disappear in the woods while filming a documentary about a local legend known as the Blair Witch. This supernatural horror film was made up of the constructed "found material", from the "documentary" footage shot by the students in the film.

It is interesting to observe the conventions employed here in order to make these films look "real". The material is informally shot in two of these films and made to appear amateurish, with contrived technical inconsistency, even incompetence. The image is allowed to go out of focus and the exposure is left on automatic in all the cases. These traits are perhaps seen as the opposite of the careful construction of classic fiction films—which look "well-made" and therefore cannot be spontaneous, even to the untrained eye. There is much possibility for debate on fiction and non-fiction aesthetics here, but these films

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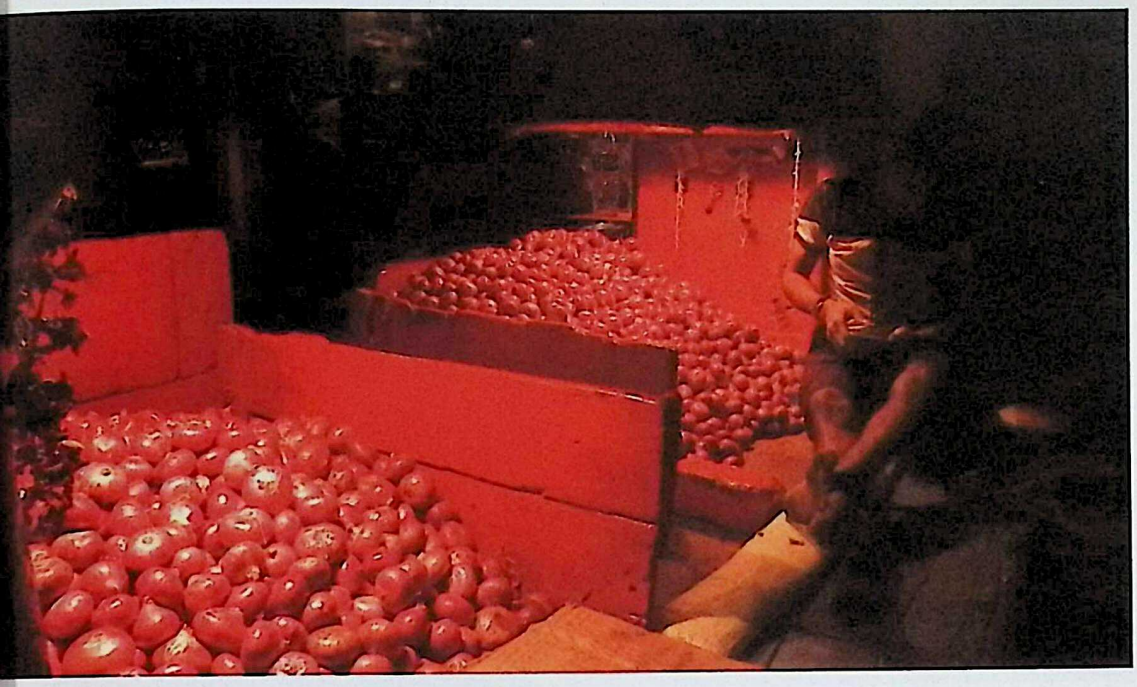

succeeded in their construction of the "real". What was also remarkable was that these films were made on very small budgets by fiction film standards.

DV did not make it into the mainstream fiction genre, but was wholeheartedly embraced by documentary filmmakers for several reasons. First, the image was startlingly good for a light-weight prosumer camera and in many ways richer than what the larger broadcast cameras in use until then had offered. The Mini DV cameras had very efficient auto-exposure, auto-focus and image-stabilization systems, facilitating easy handheld operation. They also offered a letter-boxed 16:9 widescreen option that made the image look "quasi-cinematic" as it mimicked the fiction film formats, away from the squarish 4:3 television format of regular video cameras. This option became popular among many filmmakers, even though the cameras ran at a lower resolution in this mode. Also, the 16:9 format belonged to the future high-definition video, which had not yet been introduced in countries like India. Most importantly, the cameras were cheap and you could own a decent kit for anywhere between 1 lakh and 2 lakh rupees, depending on the model and the accessories you bought. This was a fraction of what the larger and heavier broadcast video cameras cost. It was also remarkable that consumer DV tapes cost as little as 90 rupees for an hour of recording time. This was an unprecedented saving for filmmakers who were used to spending more than ten times that amount on broadcast tapes and much more on 16mm film. The Mini DV format therefore became the default platform of production for independent filmmakers and some television documentary makers for the period of a decade, lasting roughly up to 2010. This included a quick switch to its highly compressed high-definition variant HDV (High-Definition Video).

Image Comparison of Mini DV and 35mm Film Cameras

The Mini DV image was very different from the traditionally accepted idea of a "good image". There was more to this than the film-video binary with its associated aspects of resolution, material and tonal differences. The biggest difference between the images of the Mini DV and 35mm film cameras had to do with perspective rendition, given the lenses used in each

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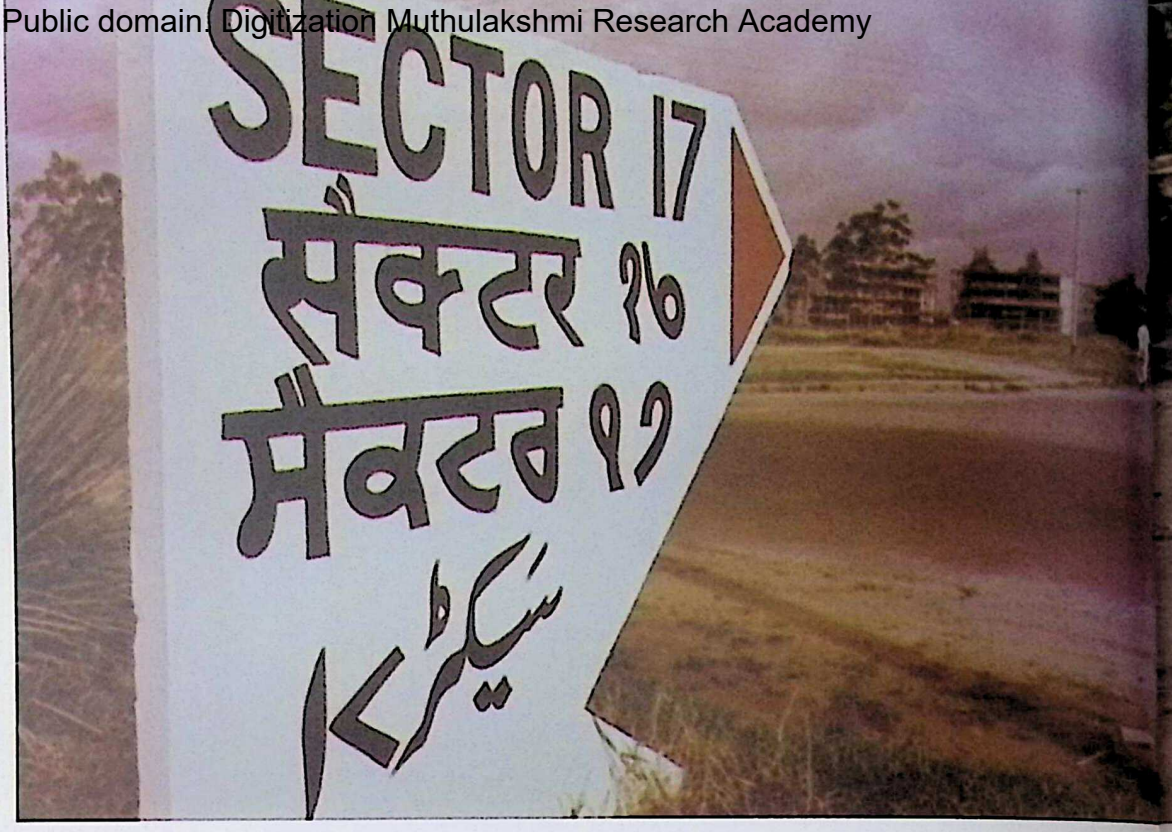

5 and 6
Images taken on the 35mm camera and the full-frame DSLR have nearly identical perspective rendition.

format. What is referred to as a "normal" lens in the 35mm film system is one that renders image perspective close to the way the human eye sees this, with similar relationships between objects and their surroundings. Prosumer Mini DV cameras like the Sony VX1000 and PD150 needed to use much wider lenses than one would use on film cameras to produce an image of the same magnification.

The Mini DV cameras had a small image-sensor, one-third inch in size, measured diagonally. For reference, a standard 35mm film camera shooting in the Academy format has an image size of a little over an inch in the diagonal. This meant that the DV cameras needed a lens three times wider than 35mm cameras did, to produce the image of an object with the same magnification, at the same distance. Therefore, the DV image had a greatly exaggerated sense of perspective compared to that of 35mm film and much more depth-of-field, making it difficult to isolate subjects from their background. Now, neither of those characteristics is a problem per se, as far as image-making goes. In fact, the wide lens used at a short distance created a sense of intimacy between the camera and the subject. But, this is not the way we were *used to seeing images*—neither with our eyes, nor in our films, with the reference standard being 35mm for both still and motion-picture photography.

This required the idea of what we considered "cinematic" to be re-examined for as long as we used the DV format. It also led to its easy rejection once a better option was available. This was the reason why "full-frame" Digital SLR cameras capable of recording video were wholeheartedly accepted by both filmmakers and audiences, when they were introduced in 2008. These had identical imaging characteristics to 35mm cameras, except for the material—film.

The Video DSLR as the New Documentary Camera

"Full-frame" High-definition Digital SLR cameras have sensors that utilize the entire frame of a 35mm still camera. They have much higher resolution than DV cameras and can use the same lenses as 35mm cameras—cine or still. This means that they have the same perspective

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characteristics as the ones we have been used to seeing in photographs and films for over a century. The images are much richer and cleaner than those made with DV or HDV cameras.

However, this format has as many limitations as advantages, which would have to be the subject of another article. Its family of cameras has been the dominant documentary standard for almost a decade, as the DV family was earlier, for the simple reason of its pricing and the associated image quality. It is possible to own a basic DSLR that shoots fairly good-looking high-definition video for as little as 25,000 rupees. Needless to say, this makes it a popular choice for production.

Conclusion

This article has briefly described the prevailing industrial trends and their impact on the aesthetics of documentary films and therefore on our way of recording and looking at visual histories. There have always been exceptions, but the dominant trends in the technological history of Indian documentary can easily be classified into the following stages:

35mm film (black-and-white, colour)—state documentary made by Films Division India

16mm film (black-and-white, colour)—independent and television documentary

Broadcast video (U-matic, Betacam, digital Betacam)—independent and television documentary

Hi-8 video—independent documentary

Digital video (DV, DVCAM, HDV, DVCPRO, DVCPRO HD, XDCAM etc.)—independent and television documentary

HDSLR video—independent and television documentary

Other formats (GoPro, cellphone video)—assorted use

At present, the landscape of the documentary is occupied by large digital sensor images. These are beautiful, much like our reference standard—35mm film. However, I wish filmmakers would surprise the medium, push it, experiment more with image-making as well as the tools available to us, to bring more visual diversity to cinema—both fiction and non-fiction.

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Hospitality in the Time of Regulation: 1970s Films Division Tourism Shorts

PRIYA JAIKUMAR

In 2002, the Indian Ministry of Tourism's Joint Secretary Amitabh Kant was tasked with selling India to the world and to itself. In his book *Branding India*, Kant narrates the beginnings of the "Incredible India" campaign, providing an account of how the public and private sectors of India's film, tourism and hospitality industries raised the nation's share of global tourism beyond the dismal 0.38 per cent, where it had stagnated. Following India's economic deregulation, the effort was to make India "a global brand, with worldwide brand recognition and strong brand equity" by crafting promotional messages for "high-yielding tourists",[1] which is one of today's many global managerial phrases that normalize extreme class differentials created by free market ideology. The "re-branding" of India has continued apace since 2002, expanding to include domestic consciousness-raising campaigns. In Kant's words again, "Parallel to 'Incredible India', a complementary campaign, entitled '*Atithi Devo Bhava*' or 'Guest is God', was launched domestically to create a sense of pride in India as a tourism destination and qualitatively improve the services provided by taxi drivers, guides, immigration and customs officials."[2]

The current campaign's cultivation of a sense of national pride in citizens, with a view to boosting India's visual and financial profile internationally, had its precedent in India's National Emergency years from 1975 to 1977. In 1977, Morarji Desai's Janata Party would rout the Congress at the polls, and put an end to governmental support for luxury tourism and hospitality by shifting priorities instead to domestic tourism for middle- and low-income groups (the eponymous *janta*).[3] During the Emergency, however, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government had been involved in schemes to promote India's high-end tourism industry even as the state aggressively limited the civil liberties of its citizens. The coexistence of policies curbing a citizenry's rights alongside state initiatives to open

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national borders to tourists and foreign currency in controlled ways is not, in itself, surprising. Both impulses are underpinned by a proto-fascist need to manage the public image of a nation, as that image turns inward to its citizens and outward to the world. During the Emergency years, not unlike today, the state adopted a paternalistic attitude toward its nation's citizenry by tutoring them on proper behaviour, while seeking efficient ways to extract new capital through the visual commodification of land for a wider audience.

The 1970s were characterized by scarce foreign exchange, high tariffs and severe trade restrictions in India. The period's state-produced visual materials promoting tourism are a revelation, because they involve complex messaging to incentivize growth in India's service sectors and middle-class consumer industries while also preaching austerity and restraint. In this brief essay, I look at a few images from a tourism promotion film produced by the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's Films Division (FD), titled *Don't Be That Greedy/Itne Laalchi Na Baniye* (henceforth *Greedy*) directed by Prem Vaidya in 1975. In addition to *Greedy*, FD produced several tourism shorts between 1975 and 1977, including *Come Again* (Loksen Lalvani, 1975); *Jaan Bachi aur Lakhon Paye* (Getting Away with Your Life is Worth a Million, Upadhyay, 1975); *Preserving Our Heritage* (Samiran Datta, 1975); *Honoured Guest* (B.N. Mehta, 1975); *All the Way* (B.G. Devare, 1975); *Kashmir: A Dream in Winter* (Ashok Sagar/A.K. Sagar, 1975); *Tourism: An Economic Boon* (G.C. Bharadwaj, 1977). Several conclude with the following direct address message to the audience from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi: "Let us give every tourist a friend's welcome. Let us share with our guests the warmth of our hearts and the rich beauty of India" (figure 1).

Greedy runs a little over 3 minutes with minimal dialogue, and opens with a silver-haired Caucasian taking photographs on his Rollei 35 camera (figure 2). He is outside the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel near Bombay's Gateway of India, clicking an image of the iconic Shivaji statue. The camera pans from the man's lens to the subjects of his photography, and with every click we see a rapid sequence of stills. We jump in time and space as the man's photographs give us a series of touristic images associated with India without any particular geographic specificity (figure 3). At the end of his (and our) brief photographic tour, we are back in Colaba. The man calls for a taxi, and from this point onwards, he is assailed by Indian men silently begging him for a *bakshish* or tip (figures 4 and 5). From an urchin who opens his taxi door to a formally attired *darban* (doorman) outside his government hotel to a receptionist, an elevator boy, and finally a room service employee, they all open their palms for gratuity. "Oh my God" says the tourist in disgust, calling for a ticket to Hamburg on Lufthansa Airlines. A young sales agent enters the room with his ticket. Unsolicited, the tourist offers him a tip. The young man blocks it with a "No thank you" (figure 6). This image and the tourist's surprised expression is held for a moment, as we witness a quick montage of all those who implored the tourist for tips. Back in the present, the tourist shakes the young Indian's hand exclaiming, "Oh, you are a nice boy!" Indira Gandhi's statement about welcoming tourists concludes the film.

The FD travel shorts use minimal dialogue, but each frame compacts a dense history of the era. Let us take the image of the tourist with his camera in *Greedy* (figure 2). The tourist's accent, flight destination, and camera establish that he is German. Rollei cameras were made by a German company specializing in optical technologies, and this introductory frame shows the man in front of a street advertisement for ORWO film. ORWO (Original Wolfen) film was imported from East Germany, India's soft-currency trading partner. Soft currency refers to currencies with limited transactional value outside their national borders, because they are bolstered by exchange control regulations in protectionist markets. These included

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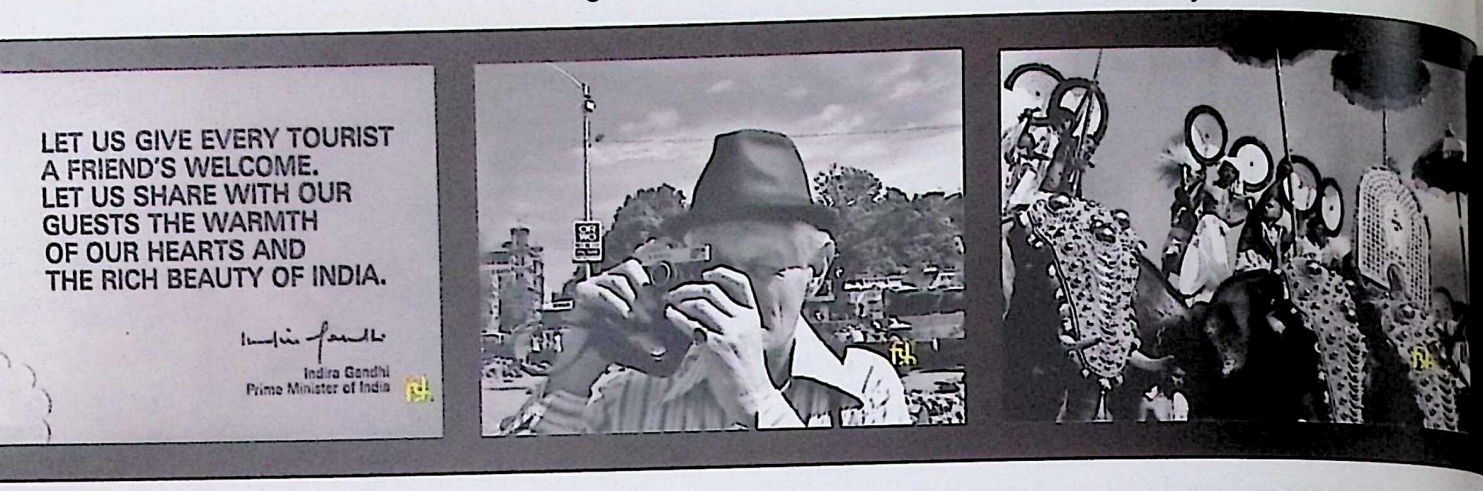

1–6
Stills from the Films Division of India short, *Don't Be That Greedy/Itne Laalchi Na Baniye*, directed by Prem Vaidya in 1975.

the Indian rupee and the East German ostmark, prior to the economic restructuring of both regions. In contrast, hard currencies, such as dollars and pounds, circulated freely in international transactions (or rather, were free to circulate because the global market yielded to imperial nations that had consolidated their power in the post-War Bretton Woods agreement).

In the 1970s, India was eligible to trade primarily with soft-currency nations because it had minimal hard-currency reserves. Colour film stock, in particular, was imported with India's precious foreign exchange, and came under severe state regulation. In this context, the image of a German man filming India's touristic sites with an ad for ORWO film in the background extends an implicit message of the nation's international collaboration and potential cosmopolitanism, despite domestic financial constraints. One of the top commercial grossers of 1975 was *Jai Santoshi Maa* (Vijay Sharma), which was filmed with ORWO colour as were other feature films at that time. Ads for ORWO film were ubiquitous on urban billboards in the 1970s, which lends the FD frame its realism while also subliminally asserting India's transnational ambitions.

The 1970s FD tourism shorts have much in common with each other. Whereas commercial Hindi features from this period typically depict Indian stars as tourists romancing in Indian hill stations and resorts as well as international destinations (particularly in song and dance sequences), FD shorts address Indians almost exclusively as hosts. The tourists of the FD shorts are white non-Indians. Moreover, these shorts repeat tropes from British colonial documentaries that construct their narrative by pitting good against bad natives. In the FD shorts, the allies of the white tourists are English-speaking Indians represented as young professionals, dressed in Western formals. Against the honest few are the unscrupulous many. These Indians are either part of an amorphous crowd, or occupy subservient positions and informal jobs. Interestingly, the numerous Indians who attract the film's admonition expose fundamental infrastructural weaknesses in India in ways unintended by the films. The men harassing the German for tips expose the disparity between their income and the wealth of white Europeans. *Jaan Bachi aur Lakhon Paye*, a film entirely without dialogue, shows an autorickshaw driver taking two white women for a nail-biting ride in Janpath in New Delhi, demonstrating his indifference to traffic rules but also conceding the general lack of their imposition in the city. The mise-en-scene of the shorts typically includes iconic urban architectural sites or recognizable travel and tourism centres. The old tourist of *Greedy* looks at famous buildings in Bombay's Apollo Bunder area, just as a young Caucasian tourist in *Come Again* looks out of his hotel window onto Bombay's Marine Drive (closely imitating Amitabh Bachchan in *Deewar*, released the same year). *Come Again* is

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about a foreign tourist who misplaces his wedding ring, purchased at Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri in Bombay. The man visits the Air India office and the Cottage Emporium, where a cashier who works at the metal handicrafts counter has kept the ring safe. Much like the good citizen who turns down the German's tip in *Greedy*, the emporium cashier does not accept a reward.

The gesture of an Indian hand refusing a tip is clearly understood as a tourist-friendly act that will help bring foreign exchange into India in the years of economic protectionism. During the Emergency, the state regulated trade in commodities and finance, and took measures to control India's free press and arrest members of the opposition. At the same time, Indira Gandhi's government hoped to entice multinational investors to high-end tourism in India. The state facilitated the construction of four- and five-star hotels, and commissioned a repertoire of picturesque travel images for state tourism brochures and FD shorts. These measures put the fantasy of consumerism and luxury within view of a public that could largely not afford it, while striking an affective balance between eliciting public fascination for travel and encouraging hospitality and reserve that are coded as Indian. As a collective, the FD tourism shorts of the 1970s offer flattering images of India's service sector and consumer industries, while preaching middle-class integrity and self-abnegation. Their cinematic condemnation of illicit and petty financial transactions tacitly covers over larger issues of corruption in India's political system. The shorts promote the virtues of public service at a time when a range of clandestine economies—including the black-market in film stock that sold at extremely high markups because of its scarcity—thrived in a marketplace defined by state restrictions. These FD images are an entry into the continuing history of national image management under India's different political regimes.

FIGURE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All images in this essay are screen grabs from *Don't Be That Greedy/Itne Laalchi Na Baniye*, Prem Vaidya, 1975. Thanks to Mr Anil Kumar and the Films Division of India for assistance with the purchase of this film.

NOTES

1 Amitabh Kant, *Branding India: An Incredible Story* (Noida, UP: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), p. 6.

2 Ibid., p. 28.

3 Linda K. Richter, *The Politics of Tourism in Asia* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1989), pp. 113–33.

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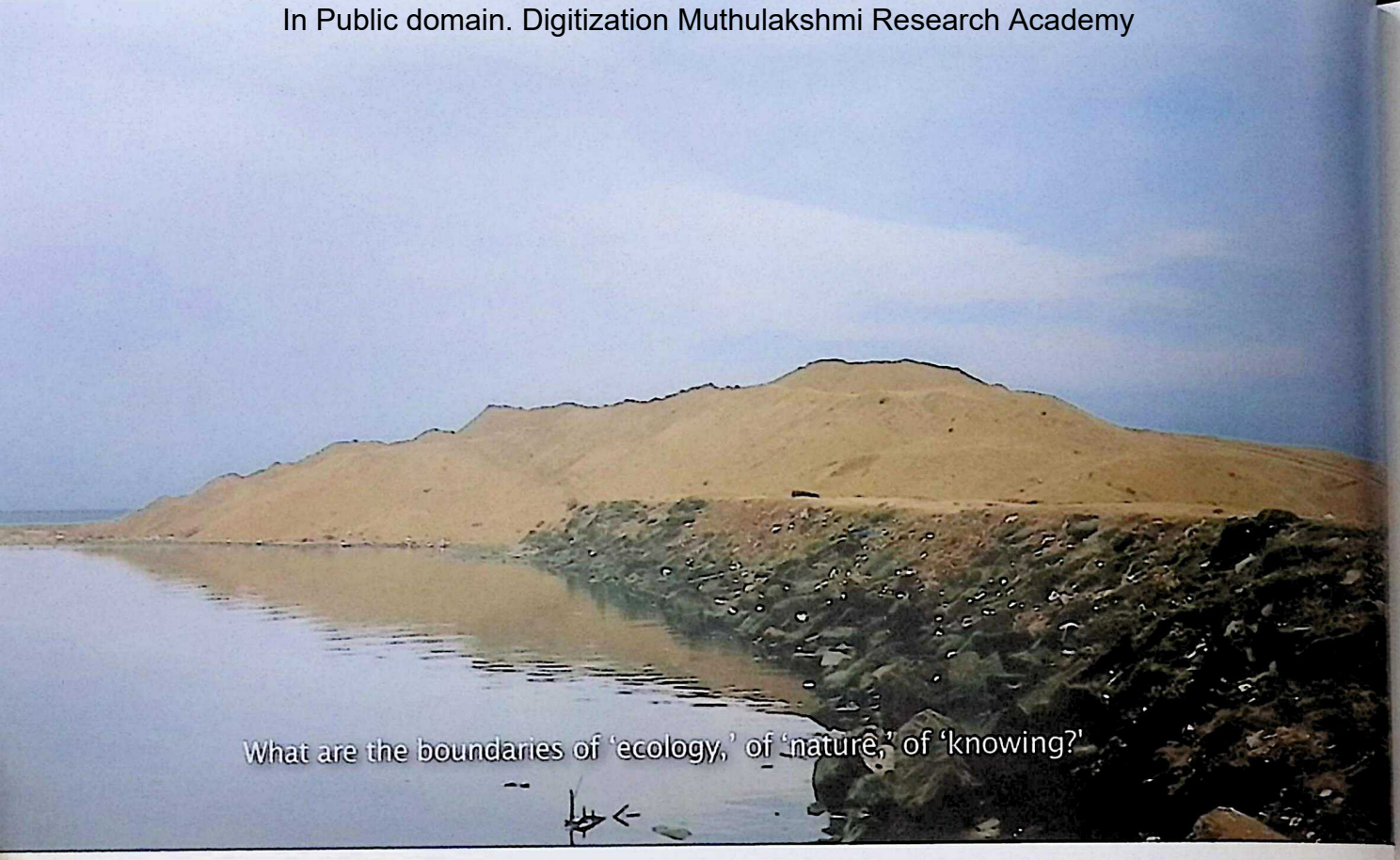

Death by Water: Environmental Documentaries, a Brief Overview

VEENA HARIHARAN

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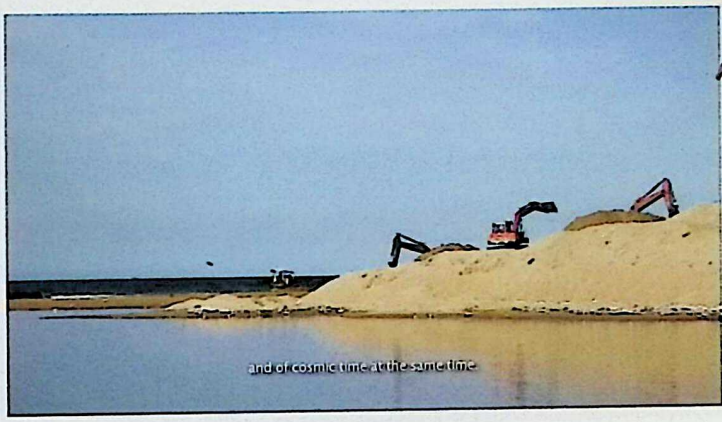

1–3
Stills from *Neythal Diary*, Ravi Agarwal, 2016.

All images in this essay are by artist Ravi Agarwal.

As far back as 1949, Fernand Braudel in his classic *The Mediterranean*, had already warned that it was impossible for a historian to treat the environment as a slow and timeless backdrop.[1] Similarly, it is no longer possible to see man as a "prisoner of climate" as Alfred Crosby envisaged him as late as 1995 in his important environmental survey.[2] Reworking both these theses, an essay by Dipesh Chakrabarty in 2009 develops the idea of the anthropocene as a critical analytic to understand the current ecological crisis and its implications for the history of humanity and a critique of global capital.[3] Borrowed from the scientific enquiries of Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, who used the term for the first time to describe geological time where man is himself the primary agent of environmental change, "anthropocene" has now come to connote a clock, as well as a planetary condition, where anthropos or man himself is the subject and object of large-scale planetary transformation.

The documentaries that I track below focus on the troubling and troubled sites of the anthropocene, the results of human intervention in the course of the life of water on our planet: building of dams, reservoirs and canals for hydroelectric projects, interlinking of rivers and river transfers, groundwater extraction, patrolling of seas, control of marine fishing, water wars and water piracy, and corporate takeovers, institutionalization and commercialization of water. They also look at the direct and indirect results of such human interventions, namely pollution and scarcity, environmental extremes—droughts, floods, tsunamis—as well as transnational advocacy networks that respond in rational rage against this man-made destruction of water ecosystems.

Early documentary production in India, monopolized as it was by the state-sponsored Films Division (FD) and a few scattered so-called "independents", peddled to the newly independent nation narratives of development in which water was more than anything else a resource to be harnessed, in order to deliver the nation to modernity via large-scale

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4 and 5
Stills from *Sangam Dialogue*, Ravi Agarwal, 2017.

irrigation and hydroelectric projects. And so it was that an "electrically-minded" nation fell in love with big dams. Indeed, dams were a favourite subject of FD documentaries and the films were a tribute to concrete, steel, gigantism, scientific modernity and hydroelectric power. An instance of this is captured by Peter Sutoris, who reads an interesting moment from P.V. Pathy's *Earth and Water* (1956), told from the perspective of the happy-to-be-dammed Bhavani river, while several low-angle shots frame the sheer gigantism of the dams, juxtaposing them with monumental temples.[4]

As the Nehruvian developmental model unravelled through the 1960s, anti-state activism, most famously the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), against big dams began to gather critical momentum. NBA Docs/Documentaries[5]—from the pioneering *Kaise Jeebo Re!* (Jharna Jhaveri and Anurag Singh, 1997) to Sanjay Kak's *Words on Water* (2002)—have played a major role in the movement. The films mobilize government-sponsored newsreels, engineering plans, budgets and public policy documents together with testimonies of those displaced by the dam—adivasis (the original inhabitants of these river basins and surrounding forests)—to create their archives of protest. Often framed against lush landscapes that are soon to disappear with the dams, these testimonies from witnesses, NBA and adivasi activists, such as Luhariya Sankariya, eloquently politicized by their loss and displacement, are used for audience mobilization in more than one film. Simanthini Dhuru and Anand Patwardhan's chronicle of the movement, *The Narmada Diary* (1995) climaxes in a face-off between NBA activists led by Medha Patkar and World Bank officials. Wherever the film has been screened since, there have been impassioned discussions and arguments proving that these activist documentaries have an afterlife that continues to sustain the movement. There are also in these documentaries, as Bishnupriya Ghosh argues, a political aesthetic and an affective cartography mobilized by the Narmada river itself—often swelling and immense—and the heroic figure of the displaced victim such as the ferryman silhouetted against the sky in Dhuru and Patwardhan's film.[6]

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Since the NBA Docs, many NGOs have made documentaries that address micro and macro issues related to water. Often ethnographic and pedagogical, the subjects of these films range from exploration of the city of Mumbai through its waterscapes (AHRC-funded *Liquid City: Water, Landscape and Social Formation in Twenty-first Century Mumbai*, Mathew Gandhy, 2007) to the work of the NGO Nav Jagriti in coping with flooding in North Bihar's rivers (Sanjay Barnela and Samreen Farooqi's *Living with Floods*, 2012) and the pollution of India's most sacred water body—the river Ganga (*The Sacred Balance*, Kensington Communications, 2002). Some of the ethnographic accounts include women walking for miles to fetch water in arid villages in Gujarat (*Walking for Water*, ADB, 2003); the formation of water "communities" in Lele, Nepal along caste and gender lines (*Pani-Water*, Sushma Joshi, NEWAH [Nepal Water for Health], 2001) or the heroic efforts of "paniharis" or "water women"—the women who fetch water in the desert communities of Rajasthan (*Panihari*, Abi Divan and Sudhi Rajagopal, 2004).

One of the major nodes of dissemination of these documentaries has been television. Though scant attention has been given to environmental programmes on television, a few channels like NDTV and ABP News have dedicated shows on environmental issues.[7] Indeed it is the state-owned and rather unglamorous Doordarshan (DD) that has actually shown a lot of environmental programmes, and even plans to launch DD-Prakriti, a 24x7 channel focused on local content that discusses environmental matters, as it was noted that the large MNC channels like Discovery and National Geographic[8] do not address the specific contexts in India. Typically ecological issues are relegated to Sunday features, competing as they do for TRP ratings with news and celebrity shows and TV serials. Even in the scant coverage, prominence is given to glitzy tigers and their celebrity patrons (though NDTV's *Save the Tiger* campaign has been immensely successful), mining scams, or Jairam Ramesh's controversial tenure as environment minister, rather than focusing on less visible ecological issues and the subjects of dispossession.

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6 and 7
Stills from *The Sewage Pond's Memoir*, Ravi Agarwal, 2011.

In 2017 National Geographic, along with non-profit organization Water Aid Foundation, launched *Mission Blue*, roping in industry filmmakers Hansal Mehta, Madhur Bhandarkar, Imtiaz Ali and Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury and popular stars like Farhan Akhtar in a series of short promotionals. These public service announcements (PSAs) are overtly pedagogical attempts to instil an awareness of water ecosystems, their scarcity and preciousness. In Nishta Jain's recent *Submerged* (2016), a film about people devastated by Bihar floods—a Virtual Reality project produced by Anand Gandhi's Memesys Culture Lab—the 360-degree camera is used to create an immersive and empathetic experience of fields submerged under flood water for the viewer.

Apart from television one of the distribution platforms of environmental films in India is CMS Vatavaran, India's bi-annual Environment and Wildlife Film Festival Forum dedicated to contemporary environmental issues. In fact, the recently concluded festival, with the theme "Conservation4water", dealt with water-related issues, highlighting problems such as Kashmir's eco-sensitive zones as well as local micro solutions such as rainwater harvesting. Featuring over 100 films, the event is supported and partnered by the Government of India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, National Geographic, UNESCO, UNDP and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Straddling the worlds of activism and art, and exhibiting in alternative circuits, are artists like Ravi Agarwal in whose work we see the documentary impulse to save water for the planet. Agarwal, who works with photographs, video and public art installations supporting environmental causes, has exhibited internationally including at documenta11, where his works were first highlighted by Okwui Enwezor. He is also the director of Toxics Link, an environmental NGO that has done extensive studies on the toxicity of the Yamuna river and its floodplains in New Delhi. Nearly 3.8 million tonnes of untreated sewage is dumped into the river, with the city of Delhi contributing nearly 80 per cent of effluents. Agarwal also mounted the Yamuna-Elbe project in 2011 in Delhi and Hamburg in collaboration with land artist Till Krause and art historian Nina Kalenbach, to raise ecological awareness around the rivers in these two cities. The public art project held on the banks of the Yamuna and Elbe exhibited the works of many Indian artists including Atul Bhalla and Sheba Chhachhi, as well as Nana Petzet and Jochen Lempert (from Germany), among others. In Agarwal's film *The Sewage Pond's Memoir* (2011) the autobiographical interacts with the industrial and mechanical, as the water that flows turns to sewage in the Aravalli forest, and the film is told

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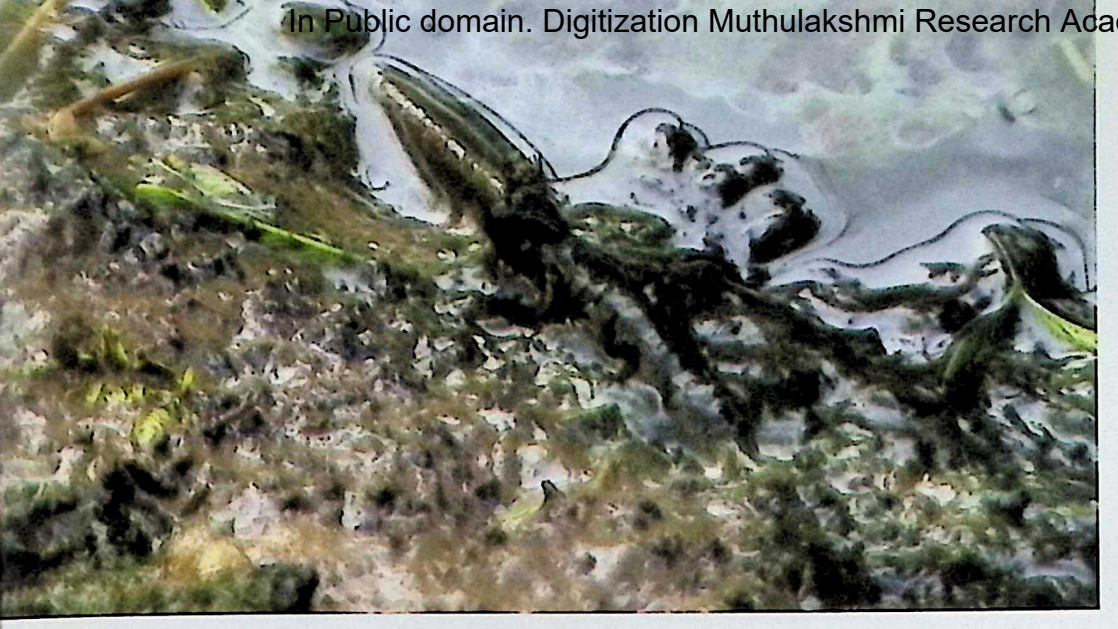

from the sewage's point of view, pointing to a dysfunctional ecosystem. Recently Agarwal has turned his focus from rivers to seas. In *Catamaran*, on the planks of wood of a roughly-hewn fisherman's boat, are carved words from Tamil Sangam poetry: "Evening has come, soon darkness too will close in"—a telling line that captures the state of water on our planet, in the time of the anthropocene.

NOTES

1 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1949, reprinted 1996), p. 20.

2 Alfred Crosby Jr., "The Past and Present of Environmental History", *American Historical Review*, 100 (October 1995): 1185.

3 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter 2009).

4 Peter Sutoris, *Visions of Development: Films Division of India and the Imagination of Progress, 1948–75* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 132, 151–52, 159.

5 Some of the NBA Docs include: *A Valley Refuses to Die* (K.P. Sashi and Ratna Mathur, 1998), *Narmada: A Valley Rises* (Ali Kazimi, 1994), *The Narmada Diary* (Simanthini Dhuru and Anand Patwardhan, 1995), *Kaise Jeebo Re!* (How Shall We Survive, Jharna Jhaveri and Anurag Singh, 1997), *I Will Report Honestly* (Aravinda Pillamarri, 1999), *Words on Water* (Sanjay Kak, 2002), *Drowned Out* (Fanny Armstrong, 2002), the autobiographical *My Narmada Diary* (Leena Pendharkar, 2002) and *Dam/Age* (Aradhana Seth, 2002).

6 Bishnupriya Ghosh, "We Shall Drown, We Shall Not Move: The Ecologics of Testimony in NBA Documentaries", in Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker (eds.), *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 59–82.

7 See Sandeep Mertia, "Environment via Television News Media in India", 2012, online article, academia.edu. Accessed on March 1, 2018.

8 Launched in India in 1998, the National Geographic channel now has 55 million subscribers and reaches almost 139 million viewers per month, according to the channel's statistics.

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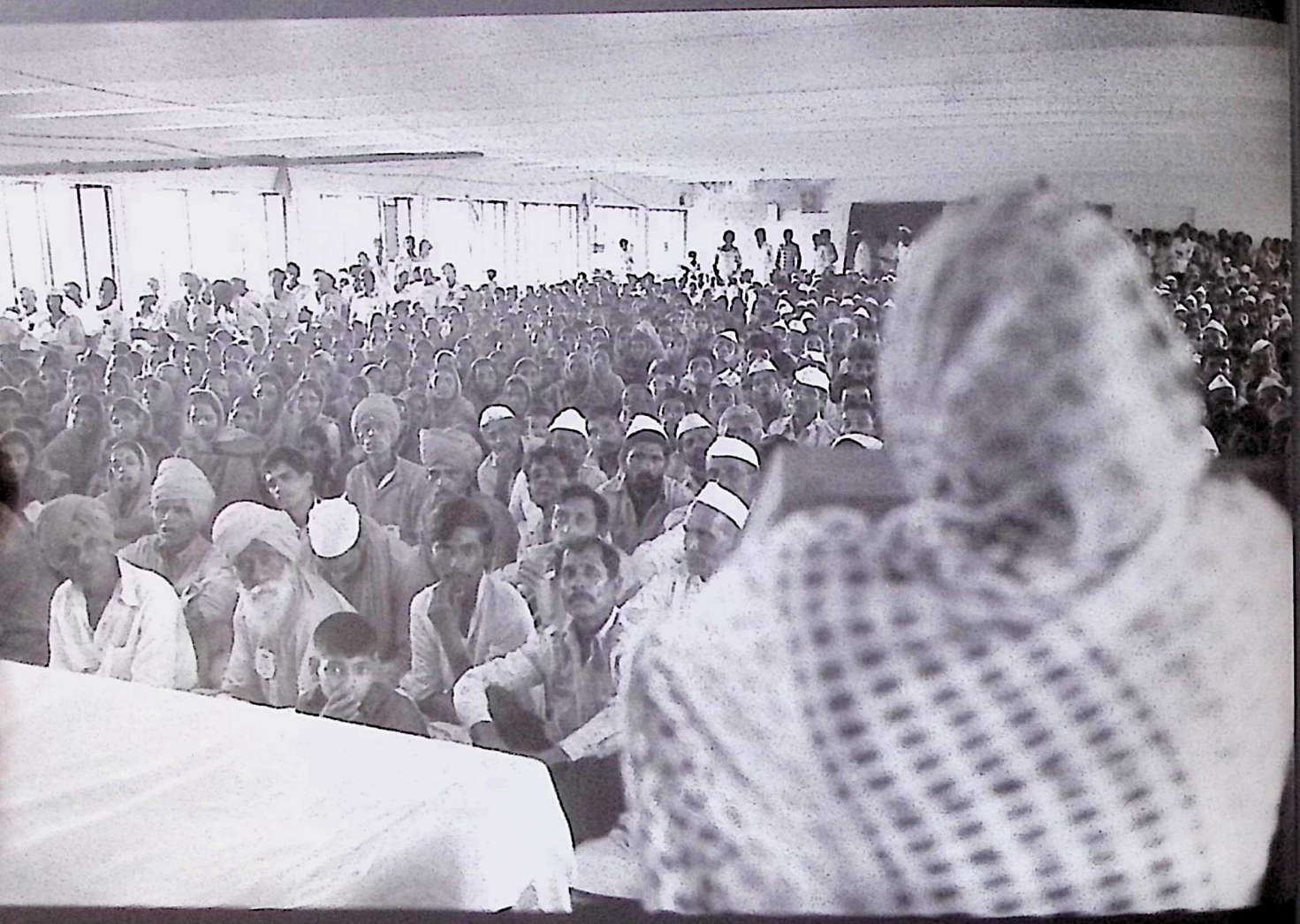

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Metabolisms of the Feminist Archive and the Nowness of Yugantar (1980–83)

NICOLE WOLF

DECEMBER 2017. A SEMINAR ROOM AT CIVIDEP (BENGALURU).[1] PRESENT ARE board members of the Bangalore Garment Labour Union, the Karnataka Domestic Workers Union, Munnade,[2] and Cividep, along with the filmmaker Deepa Dhanraj and myself. All gathered to watch Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali (Tobacco Embers, by Yugantar, 1982). We struggle with the projector, then decide to watch the film on the small computer screen, 15 people aligning their chairs closely so they can see. The room is only semi-dark. The low-res video file was attained from filming a 16mm film print, extensively screened in the early '80s, scratched and damaged, off the analog editing table. The atmosphere in the room is exceptionally concentrated for the entire 30-minute duration of the film. It is followed by enthusiastic discussions, astonishment and respect. Everyone expresses their deep admiration for the Nipani female tobacco workers, their dedication to the strike actions that Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali followed and enacted, the women's endurance, the strength and determination in their speeches, the clarity of their demands—8-hour shifts, regulated lunch breaks, paid overtime, bonus. At the same time, everyone is struck by the state of workers' rights today: demands are considerably less radical, and it is a challenge to organize workers given the fragmentation of the work-force, composed of migrant labourers from diverse locations, speaking different languages, often under the age of 18, restricted to hostels with poor living conditions.

"Theirs was a traditional strike."

Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali, made in 1982, is viewed like a manual for successful strike action: women workers stuck together day and night, they galvanized workers from close-by factories through physical presence and talking, they did not go home but ate and slept in public spaces for several days, sustained by water, food and blankets provided by the local community.

1
Production still from *Molkarin*, 1981.

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No one questioned the relevance of re-screening this "old, scratched, black-and-white film from another era"; everyone present was keen to get their hands on a copy, preferably in multiple language versions.

"We will screen this to at least 400,000 workers."

Post-Emergency Synergies

Abha Baiya, Deepa Dhanraj and Meera Rao met after India's Emergency (1975–77). Like many of their female contemporaries they were galvanized by "the hopes and passions" that many have since then attributed to the autonomous women's movements that arose during the late '70s and early '80s. A time "buoyant, energetic and hugely innovative, drawing from and contributing to other social movements of the time, part of the struggles for civil liberties and democratic rights in the country. Inheritor too, of radical youth and student movements in India and across the world; (...)."[3] Despite the still existing curtailment of civil rights and widespread experiences of state violence, everyone I have spoken to about the post-Emergency period has emphasized the radical potential and the immense sense of possibility felt during that time.

Precisely that energy and the many diverse activist and cultural practices inspired Baiya, Dhanraj and Rao to found the feminist film collective Yugantar (Change), supported by the cameraperson Navroze Contractor as well as the recording engineer G.V. Somashekar.[4] Their political passions were directed to movement-building and filmmaking was for them one of several possible pathways. At the same time they initiated Yugantar when there was no precedent in collective and participatory filmmaking practices. There were only a few instances of non-governmental, independent filmmaking, and representational frameworks for female subjects and in particular working-class women on screen were very limited.

Yugantar and Film Technology

As Contractor had worked with state-of-the-art cameras in the US, the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) employed him to demonstrate the ARIIFLEX 16SR in the late 1970s. These cameras had been newly imported and were subsequently rented to Yugantar. The collective produced three short films between 1980 and 1983.[5] The lenses they used for *Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali* were Angenioux 12-120 F2.2 zoom lenses, and for *Idhi Katha Matramena* Arri Prime lenses 12mm, 16mm and 25mm, all T1.3. Ordinary 100-watt bulbs were used for good exposure but four 1,000-watt sun guns were used for the large meetings filmed for *Molkarin* so as not to disturb the ambience. The recorders used were Nagra for *Molkarin* and later Nagra S; the boom microphone was Sennheiser 816. All three films were shot on ORWO (East European) black-and-white negative film, at the time subsidized as part of socialist state friendships. Only 15 rolls of 400ft (10 minutes) of film stock were available for each film.[6]

I argue below that this particular moment of radical transformation, imbued with a sense that it was possible to reimagine political movements outside the framework of party politics, also sparked new synergies between political practices, filmmaking and broader cultural practices. The urgency to rethink the political and modes of political affiliations motivated a film practice grounded in collaboration at every step. The creation of new political subjects was brought together with the process of subjects first conceiving and

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2
Production still from *Molkarin*, 1981.

furthermore expanding their own screen presence. It is precisely in this synergy that Yugantar's nowness resides. This was tangible during the 2017 Bengaluru screening, in which the hitherto stored and now archived films acquired a metabolic charge and sense of aliveness as transformative possibilities in the past connected affectively to contemporary workers' struggles.

Languages of Political Affiliations

Each film produced by Yugantar developed through collaborative processes with an existing or an emerging political constituency. The encounter of two collectives demanded the invention of a participatory practice before this term came to stand in for a set method employed by NGOs and then applied to communities. Yugantar acknowledged that they owned the means of production, even if precariously, but endeavoured to "create a collaborative practice; (...) [to] generate theory and practice together. (...) [to] struggle together, to come up not only with the form but with an understanding, with an insight, something that really goes against the grain, that disturbs what you are presenting."[7] The film collective thus conversed with ongoing processes of politicization: of domestic workers in Pune for *Molkarin* (Maid Servant) (25 mins, 16mm, black-and-white, Marathi, 1981), female factory workers in Nipani for *Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali*, and lastly with members of Stree Shakti Sanghatana (SSS)[8] in Hyderabad for *Idhi Katha Matramena* (Is This Just a Story?) (25 mins, 16mm, black-and-white, Telugu, 1983).

Molkarin, their first film, initiated the creation of impact through its focus on the power

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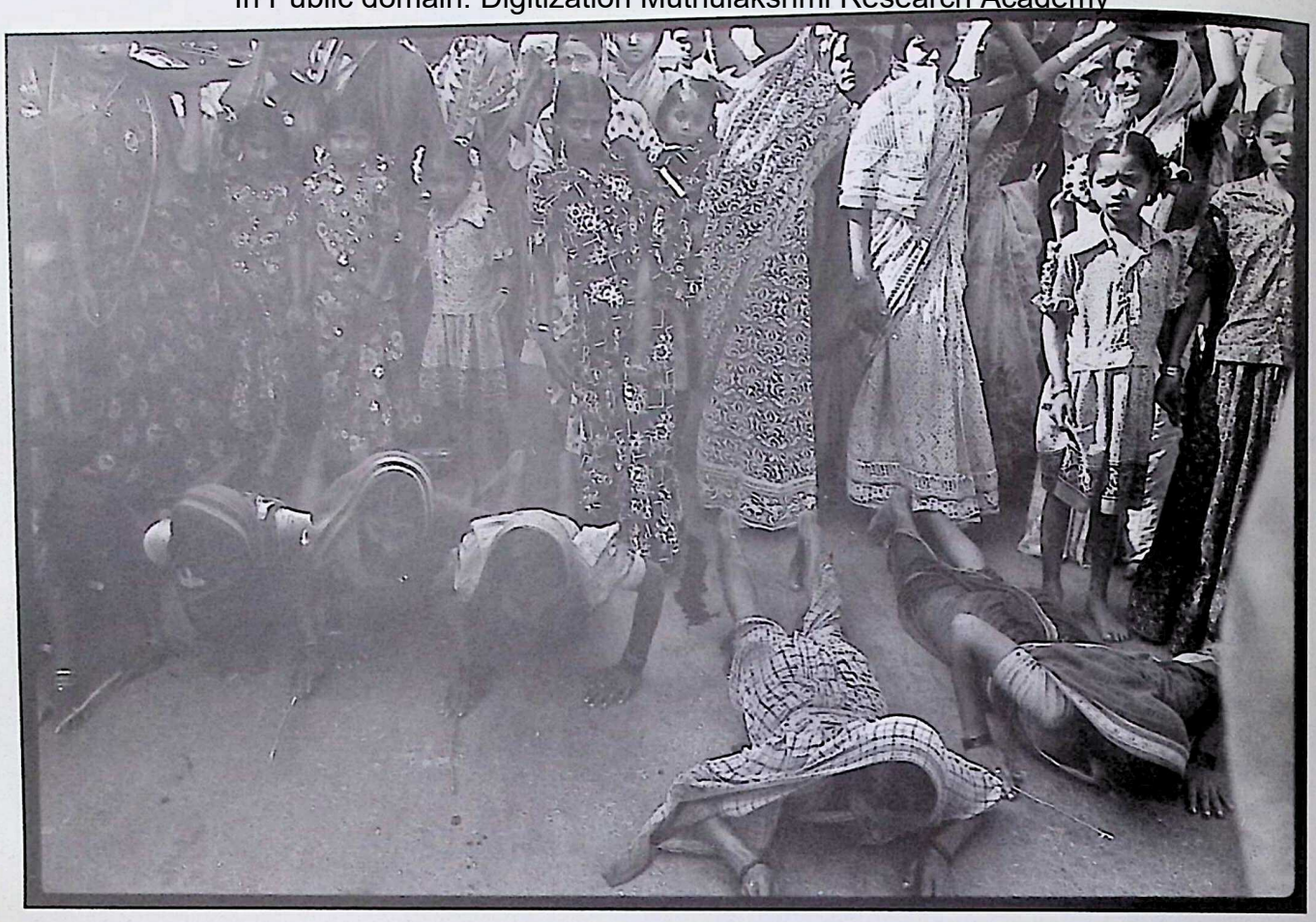

3
Production still from *Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali*, 1982.

of processes of collectivization: in its evocative aggregation of numbers (400 women met until midnight, groups of women went on strike for 3, 4 and 6 days, 800 women came out onto the streets for 15 days), in its visual stress on the process of women assembling, and through its narrative development. Yugantar met domestic workers through the Pune Shahar Molkarin Sanghatana (Pune City Domestic Workers' Organization, PCDWO), which had emerged out of a spontaneous strike of women domestic workers in Pune in February 1980. Started by Khanderabai, one domestic worker who was dismissed by her employer due to illness and subsequently gathered others around her, and initially supported by Left-oriented trade unions and women's organizations, PCDWO quickly developed into a large-scale organization that drew in domestic workers across the city. Inspired by this heroic founding moment Yugantar strove to recreate it on film with the help of the domestic workers and activists Leela Bhosale and B.J. Kerkar. *Molkarin* thus opens with one woman sweeping the floor in her employer's home, her voice-over reflecting on low payment, lack of security and the condescending behaviour of her employer. The film follows the domestic worker as she leaves her home and talks to other workers who subsequently also lay down their jobs and join her; culminating in large groups of women marching out on the streets. The camera and sound recording are often focused on movement, on feet and marching. In the longest sequence of the film women sit close together in circles—angry, arguing or laughing together. Responding creatively to the difficulty of the shooting process, *Molkarin* also engages innovatively with still images by bringing dynamic camera movement to photographs of large gatherings and women marching, reminiscent of Third Cinema aesthetics.

The need to actively produce a shared sense of solidarity, rather than assuming it, and to craft hitherto unknown screen representations through collective practices of re-

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enactment, produces a particularly remarkable energy in *Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali*.[9] Yugantar filmmakers spent four months in Nipani, listening to the stories of female tobacco factory workers after their working hours during late evenings and through the night. Many of them recounted their working conditions but also the significant strike actions which made the Nipani factory workers' union into the largest movement of unorganized labour at the time as well as the most successful: its demands for higher wages, breaks and paid overtime were ultimately met and became an example for others.[10] Yugantar deployed those accounts to sketch a collage-like loose script for image and voice-over that laid out the harsh working conditions as well as the successive development of political consciousness. They brought the script back to the workers, drawing them in as collaborators. The workers arranged access to the factory for the filmmakers for two hours. Once inside, the workers directed the crew very precisely so that the camera would capture what they deemed important: the closure of the factory gate after 8 am leaving latecomers out, which meant losing a day's salary; the toxic dust created through the beating of tobacco leaves; the locked ventilation in the factory ceilings to ensure better-quality tobacco and enable collection of dust which could also be sold, all creating a very poisonous working environment; the new machine which workers had sabotaged by throwing a small stone into it to prevent women being substituted by machine work; the stairs leading to the factory owner's office to which women were called to provide sexual favours.

What is more, the women workers re-enacted crucial aspects of the strike. This demanded large-scale gathering of hundreds of women in public squares, where they ate and slept, held meetings, listened to speeches. Working-class women, who had gone through a process of becoming political to defend their rights as workers, were now re-embodying and reliving their politicization process in and through the screen, as it came to be played back to themselves and later to many others across the country, supporting the emergence of unions.

Analogous to the development of image aesthetics, the film's voice-over was scripted from the conversations recorded during the research process. The script was returned to the workers, who then read the lines they themselves had helped compose, now for the purposes of recording, thus inducting their own distinctive enunciations and political speech acts into filmic representation. This collaborative working process was complemented by the inclusion of the workers' comments on the rough-cut during informal midnight screenings. The final voice-over thus became a collage of pluriverse testimonies re-enacted. Pioneering for its time and context, *Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali* was not carried by an expository commentary of the filmmakers, nor by authenticating any particular worker through their directly filmed testimony, thereby "(...) resisting the patronising act of 'giving a voice'. The voice-over (...) embodies a collective testimony. (...) a subjective and direct address that is yet not an individual's voice, a practice which addresses the difficult translation process from experience to speech act and avoids the drive for authenticity attached to embodied testimony."[11]

Film/Political Education

Dhanraj and Baiya have stressed the importance of creating "political trust" and developing a learning process in which collaborative filmmaking was a key feature. Their collective learning process challenged and contested the Marxist-Leninist political vocabularies of labour they came out of; and it inaugurated new formal choices in their filmmaking. In hindsight Dhanraj however also critiques their wanting to create "working-class heroines".

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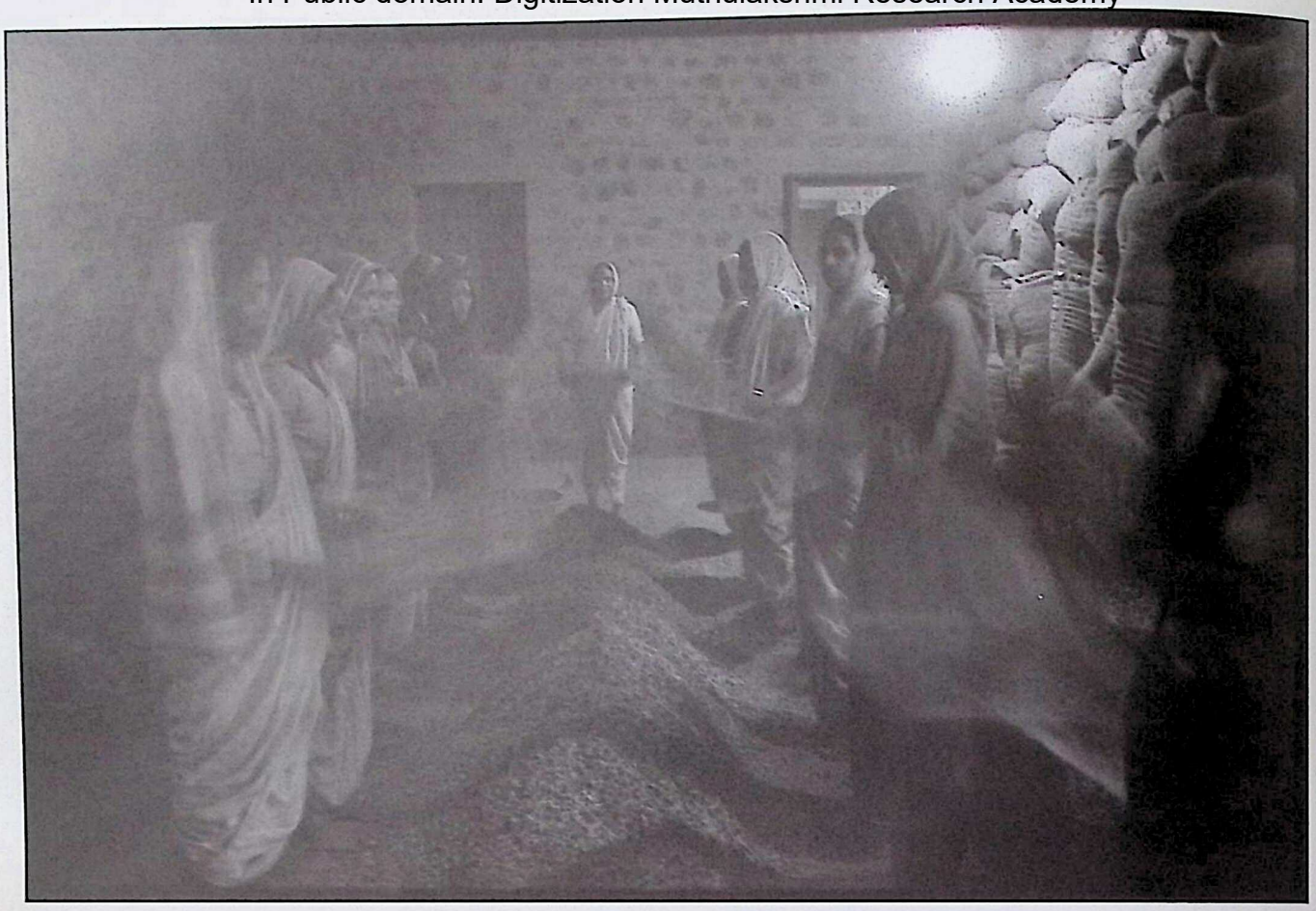

4
Production still from *Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali*, 1982.

Caste-based divisions, the fact that many factory workers were Devdasi women, Muslim women or widows and therefore perceived as sexually available for the factory owner—these issues were not engaged with, just as the question of domestic violence tended to be excluded from their agenda at the time.

While this self-critique is more articulate now, it did lead to Yugantar's collaboration with the feminist research and activist collective Stree Shakti Sangathana. sss's extensive research expanded the then prevalent debate on dowry deaths and suicides to naming violence—specifically domestic violence—and came to focus on the family, including the middle-class family, as a key site of patriarchal violence. In a consciousness-raising style of night-long debates, Yugantar and sss shared their own experiences of violence. These cathartic conversations culminated in *Idhi Katha Matramena*, an improvised fiction film that continued Yugantar's pioneering of multilayered self-reflexive female subjects on screen.[12]

A Feminism that Metabolizes the Archive

Idhi Katha Matramena became Yugantar's "hit film", with diverse female audiences stirred to tears and passionate debate. A recent screening of the film at Hyderabad University provoked emotional responses, forging a connection almost directly to current debates on the nuances of sexual harassment.

Yugantar's films raise questions about the legacies of feminist archives for documentary and political practice today. The restoration of the 16mm prints—showing traces of the many screenings during the early 1980s and of adverse climatic storing conditions—carries the charge of an enthusiasm for the vibrant political time they emerged out of. At the same time it has been accompanied by questions. How to relate to political and filmmaking

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legacies neither as a practice of excavation nor of prescription? How to acknowledge and make productive the limitations of questions posed and issues raised that were part of the political context they were born from? Actively working with the feminist archive as living metabolism would build on their singular synergies; it would do the kind of archiving, restoration, screening and thinking work that connects to that nowness that releases and translates the affective spaces of radical change without ossifying our readings of these traditions. What is to be restored and persisted with is the making of new alliances between film and political practice and novel concepts of collective political realms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the interlocutors without whom this article would not be possible. My first conversation with Deepa Dhanraj was in 1999 and continued thereafter. Formal work with Yugantar's films started in 2011 during the Persistence Resistance film festival (London). Restoration processes are currently supported by the project Archive außer sich, a project of Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art in cooperation with Haus der Kulturen der Welt (both Berlin, Germany). This article is also based on conversations with Abha Baiya (2013), Navroze Contractor (2013 and ongoing), G.V. Somashekar (2017), members of Stree Shakti Sangathana (Lalita K., Vasanth Kannabiran, Kalpana Kannabiran, Rama Melkote) and several others who screened Yugantar's films during the early '80s.

All images in this essay are by Navroze Contractor.

NOTES

1 A civil society organization for Workers Rights and Corporate Accountability, based in Bengaluru. See www.cividep.org.

2 A Bengaluru-based NGO and union working for women workers in the textile industry. https://femnet-ev.de/index.php/en/solidarity-fund/munnade-india.

3 R. Menon, *Making a Difference: Memories from the Women's Movement in India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2011), p. xii.

4 Baiya was a researcher and activist who later co-founded the organizations Saheli and Jagori (both Delhi-based); Dhanraj had been an apprentice with fiction filmmakers Pattabhi Rama Reddy, M.S. Sathyu and Chandrasekhar; Rao was working in an advertising agency and is now based in the US; Contractor was trained in camera and Somashekar in sound engineering, both at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune.

5 Baiya, Contractor, Dhanraj and Somashekar continued to collaborate on *Sudesha* (30 mins, 16mm, colour, produced by Faust Film, Munich) and *Something Like a War* (51 mins, 16mm, colour).

6 Contractor, email conversation with author, March 2018.

7 D. Dhanraj in transcript of panel "Current Urgencies, Feminist Legacies and Political Fiction", with S. Chhachhi, D. Dhanraj and M. Dutta; conceptualized and chaired by Nicole Wolf, for *Visible Evidence 21*, New Delhi, December 11–14, 2014.

8 Some of the founding members in early 1978 were Lalita K., Vasantha Kannabiran, Rama Melkote, Uma Maheshwari, Susie Tharu and Veena Shatrugna.

9 See also: N. Wolf, "Projecting *Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali*: Reflections towards a Versatile Archive of Political Cinemas", in Raqs Media Collective and S. Sarda (eds.), *Sarai-Reader 09: Projections* (New Delhi, 2013), pp. 284–90.

10 See C. Datar, *Waging Change: Women Tobacco Workers in Nipani Organize* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989).

11 Wolf, "Projecting *Tambakoo Chaakila Oob Ali*", p. 289.

12 An extended discussion of *Idhi Katha Matramena* is forthcoming in MIRAJ 7.2 (*The Moving Image Review and Art Journal*).

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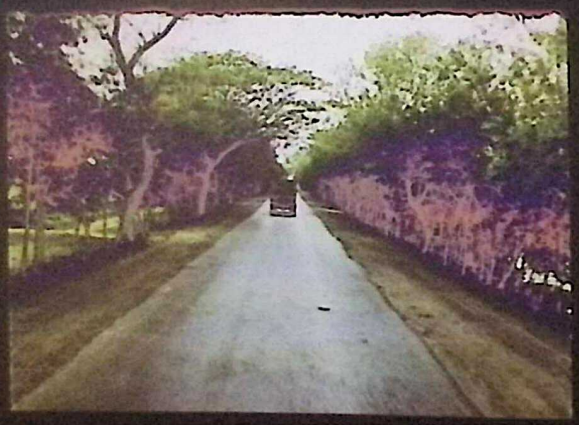

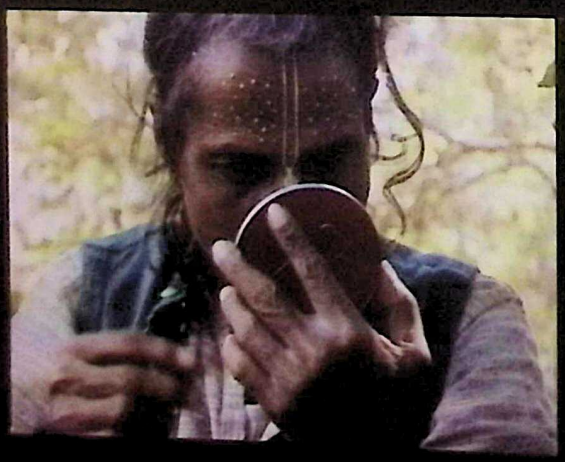

An Old Story:
A man walks down a path under a blazing sun.
His stomach is bloated, taut as a drum. He feels someone is playing a joke on him and he laughs out loud. He slaps his stomach.
The sound that bounces out makes the birds fly out of trees.
His laughter turns into song and he drums on his belly to the beat of his own walk.

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The Hiss and Scratch of Time

RUCHIR JOSHI

In the late 1970s and '80s, many of us in India who wanted to be filmmakers thought mainly of feature films. The documentary was a way-station, something you did to keep in practice, till you could embark upon a full-length fiction film. However, once the camera of your consciousness turned off the main road of feature films into the side streets of documentary, a whole world opened up. There was amazing variety there, a lot to inspire someone willing to look: the observational films of Pennebaker, the Maysles brothers and Frederick Wiseman; the stark text and image poetry of Resnais' *Night and Fog*; the great beauty and humour of Mani Kaul's *Desert of a Thousand Lines*; and (though I didn't know his work at the time), the understated rigour and brilliance of Harun Farocki's essay-films.

However, once you had a subject, the ongoing research and some measly budget, as an aspiring documentary filmmaker in mid-'80s Calcutta you needed to traverse the following obstacle course: (1) find a working 16mm camera that was not being used for TV serials or local ads, (2) find a working Nagra tape-recorder, (3) apply to the local NFDC office for a "stock permit"[1] to allow you to buy film negative, (4) befriend the people in the Kodak office so that they would actually, and in time for your shoot, get you the stock that NFDC had allowed you to buy, (5) secure a supply of imported ¼-inch tape spools from the smugglers in Metro gully. Post-shoot the obstacle course continued: (6) get your negative to a lab in Bombay for processing and printing (mostly) black-and-white rushes (later, with the opening of the West Bengal Film Development Corporation [WBFDC] film laboratory in Salt Lake you went through the business of being a guinea-pig for the lab's many teething troubles), (7) find "sep mag" (magnetic sound film) to transfer your sound for editing, (8) find slots where the city's three or four Steenbeck editing machines were free from feature film bookings (often at night), (9) find the resources to travel to Bombay and stay there to do all the finishing work on the film.

1–5 (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) Images from the restoration process of Ruchir Joshi's 1991 film *Egaro Mile/Eleven Miles*. (1) Retrieving old colour, zone by zone; (2) Krishna Das Baul; (3) Introductory inter-title; (4) Subol Das Baul; (5) The highway to the Eleven Miles bus stop.

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I enumerate all this because the difficulties had a direct impact on the film you finally showed to audiences in the two or three small venues which supported documentary films in Calcutta. The triggering desire to make a film imagined a cinema with a decent projector and sound system; the reality, with the exception of the theatre at Max Mueller Bhavan, was crackling speakers and dim projectors that would maul your print sprockets, the screenings held in foetid rooms with squeaky metal chairs and noisy fans. The other hope for dissemination was selling your film to Doordarshan, in the process recuperating some of the cost. But even that possibility was fraught with the sordid negotiations you had to undergo with every underpaid government employee, from the assistant who cleaned the Steenbeck to the clerk who gave you your censor certificate, to the bored, cynical, energy-sucking black hole of an official at Doordarshan's fortress at Golf Green. Your other long-shot hope was that your film would be selected for a festival abroad, where it would win an award or come to the positive attention of some commissioning editor of a TV channel who would then buy the film.

Given all the difficulties, independent documentary makers tended to attempt only two or three kinds of non-fiction films:[2] films commissioned by NGOs, "activist" films around a social or political issue about which the filmmaker felt passionately, and films to do with culture, usually traditional craft or performance. The first-person essay-film or films dealing elliptically with political themes were unheard of and even contemplating such films was regarded as the grossest self-indulgence—the ruling idea was that documentary was exclusively a weapon for revolution, only to be used to communicate to the masses. During a conference on documentary at Nandan (Calcutta's state-government-owned art cinema complex) in 1986, the discussions centred almost entirely around state censorship of political films; all attempts by some of us to discuss form and the self-censorship we put in place around cinematic form was dismissed by Leftist film "dadas" from around the country.

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In February 1988, when we started to shoot the film that ended up being *Egaro Mile/Eleven Miles*, the intention was well within the corral of what was deemed possible. Before the first day's shooting the idea was to make a tight 30-minute film about a group of Bauls (Bengal's traditional wandering musicians) who had gathered in a semi-rural suburb of Calcutta. We would film them—first preparing for a concert, and then performing in the evening at a venue in the city. What we encountered on that first day sent us on a journey that ended three years and several stock permits later.

There was no way to airbrush away our presence and how that changed the situations we went to shoot; the form of the film arrived at a first-person diary recounting all our confusions and missteps, all the absurdity and conflict that the filming both witnessed and created. The subjectivity embedded in the final film didn't come about by intellectual/cerebral planning but neither was it an accident—it was something that grew from repeated, stumbling but conscious efforts at an honest engagement with a group of people living a very different reality from ours; a group that was nevertheless very conscious of audio-visual technology and the world beyond Bengal in which the products of the technology found play. In personal terms, *Eleven Miles* sits across a divide: a film typically begun with chaotic impulse and rudimentary wherewithal that, through luck and some hard work, ended up being completed in London and Paris with the best available 16mm technology. I was lucky, with filmmaker Anand Patwardhan's help, to get through to Alan Fountain, a commissioning editor at UK's Channel 4. Fountain was a man who was passionate about cinema, willing to risk mistakes in experiments with the medium, willing to put those experiments to the

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6
Kolkata Brainfever. Black-and-white still from *Tales from Planet Kolkata*, Ruchir Joshi, 1993.

test of a wider viewership on his slots on the channel. The hard work involved making a decision to not have a tame, easy, ethno-exotica of a film and then putting together a trailer that reflected that choice, which in turn led to Fountain giving us the funds to complete the film properly.

Egaro Mile/Eleven Miles, finished in 1991, led to Fountain and his department indirectly funding two more films that would have no chance of finding any TV money today—*Memories of Milk City* (14 mins, 1991) and *Tales from Planet Kolkata* (38 mins, 1993). This is not the place to describe these films except it should be said that *Milk City* was a short, elliptical poem-film on a gluttonous Ahmedabad still reeling from a series of communal riots across the 1980s, and *Planet Kolkata* was an essay-satire on (what was still officially) Calcutta in its last days as the "nigger of all cities", as American video-artist Tony Cokes puts it in his spoken and performed text for the film.

The fact is that all three films were, at least in the Indian context, a contradiction in terms: shot on 16mm yet centrally built upon the first-person diary, the subjective essay and the meditative-poetic form. Within three years of the completion of the last of these, advances in video technology meant that filmmakers could own or access light-weight cameras that captured broadcast quality images and sound, and edit films at least to the point of a finished rough-cut on their home computers, taking out the chief hurdles that interfered with a more flexible approach to non-fiction filmmaking. The first-person approach that included the filmmaker and crew that was unusual between 1988 and 1993 began to be seen far more frequently by the end of the '90s.

At the time Alan Fountain was commissioning work for Channel 4 many of us made

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7
Opening sequence. *Tales from Planet Kolkata*, Ruchir Joshi, 1993.

8
Closing sequence. *Tales from Planet Kolkata*, Ruchir Joshi, 1993.

the mistake of assuming that the kind of freedom he espoused in programming was there to stay, but history had a painful lesson in store for us. Within a couple of years of the completion of *Tales*, Fountain was gone, forced out from his position at Channel 4 by a regime change at the top. Other European and Japanese channels also moved towards a more conservative, populist, maximum-eyeballs approach. The period (from the early '80s to the early '90s) where experimentation with form and non-mainstream content was welcome on British and European television was over, replaced by programming of American football, sumo wrestling, narrative-heavy factual programmes with the stories driven by European protagonists, and by game shows and reconstructions.

In India, there was a brief period when Jai Chandiram headed DD3 when alternative programming found a place, and the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) initiative carries on commissioning some oddball non-fiction but not that much. By the turn of the millennium, makers of non-fiction films in India found a new opening where their work could meet potential addressees, which was in the art gallery spaces both here and abroad.

Recently Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin began work on the digital restoration of the three 16mm films, *Eleven Miles*, *Milk City* and *Planet Kolkata*. The work began in 2016 and by the time I reached Berlin last summer, the negatives and sound had been captured digitally and the files were ready for the technicians and myself to do the colour correction on the picture and the adjustment of the sound.[3] Throughout the month-long period I felt a strange push and pull, a double or even triple-layered connection with the films. On the one hand this was my work and I knew the material really well, a lot of details coming back to me quite precisely. On the other hand, one couldn't escape the feeling of looking at these strange artefacts from another lifetime being pared apart by the latest post-production software, or magnified film-like on a screen after years of watching the films on DVDs. Things were both familiar and alien, the ghost of the film sprockets on the monitors, the well-remembered scratches and damage from when the WBFDC lab had messed up the processing of certain sequences, new "events" on the negative, the handwriting of time on hibernating emulsion, the mysterious mismatch between the "A" roll and "B" roll of the older negatives, the clicks and smudges on the soundtracks, one's own voice from decades ago, the refreshed, re-watered voices of those who were no longer with us.

When we'd finished the sound mixing for *Eleven Miles*, A.M. Padmanabhan, "Paddy", the sound engineer who mixed the film, told me: "Listen carefully to what we have done and enjoy it, because this is the last time you will hear it with this richness. The optical soundtrack will take away at least 30% of the sound quality." So, we listened to the fully finished soundtrack while watching a terribly scratched and taped picture, of mixed black-

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and-white and colour rushes battered by a long editing process. Later, when one saw the pristine, final, colour-corrected film print, there was indeed a lot less depth to the optical sound. The transfer to video from the magnetic mixed track meant that the sound was much better on tape, and later DVD, but then again, the quality of the picture had been compressed. Now, as I sat in the Arsenal Kino theatre, watching the corrected digital image accompanied by the cleaned-up soundtrack, it felt as if I was watching my own film properly for the first time after waiting for over two decades.[4]

Modern technology meant that we could have cleaned up every small segment of the image, enriched the blacks, taken down the grain, sharpened things, changed the colour and zapped most of the scratches. But we had agreed, the Berlin colleagues and myself, that we would do our best to retain the quality of the images as they would have been when first completed, with as much fidelity to the material on which they had been shot. The sound, too, was cleaned up upto a point, the depredations of time removed as far as possible, but it was not enhanced in any way. This was my work, no doubt, but in this fresh avatar it was also a marker, audio-visual evidence of that time, and the way we made documentary and non-fiction films in that technological matrix and in that pocket of history. The films belong to the present and future, where the restoration is but a step towards putting them back into circulation in dialogue with other work, but they also belong to the hiss and scratch of time.

FIGURE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All images in this essay are by the author. All of them, barring figure 6, were taken during colour correction of Joshi's digitized films in Berlin in 2017.

Egaro Mile/Eleven Miles (1991)
Director: Ruchir Joshi
Cinematography: Ranjan Palit
Sound recording and editing: Mahadeb Shi
Sound mixing: A.M. Padmanabhan

Memories of Milk City (1991)
Director: Ruchir Joshi
Cinematography: Ranjan Palit
Sound recording: Suresh Rajamani
Editing: Reena Mohan
Sound mixing: A.M. Padmanabhan

Tales from Planet Kolkata (1993)
Director: Ruchir Joshi
Cinematography: Ranjan Palit
Sound recording: Suresh Rajamani
Music and effects: Vikram Joglekar and Dee Wood
Editing: Reena Mohan
Sound mixing: A.M. Padmanabhan

NOTES

1 All film stock was imported and a limited quantity was available at any given time. Commercial producers all over India made a habit of cornering stock so that competitors could not shoot their films on schedule. To counter this, the government issued a permit allowing a producer to purchase only a fixed number of film rolls at one time. You could only get more raw stock once you got a certificate from the lab that you had exposed and processed the rolls you had bought.

2 The one exception I can think of is Mani Kaul, who during this period made *Desert of a Thousand Lines*, *Arrival* and *Dhrupad*, each with its own unique form.

3 The colour correction work was done in 2017 with Stefan Engelkamp at Concept Film, Berlin. The work began in 2016 and will be completed by the time this magazine is published.

4 Arsenal have also worked with Deepa Dhanraj on reviving *Kya Hua Iss Sheher Ko?* (What Happened to This City?, 1986) and restored *Ghashiram Kotwal* (Yukt Film Cooperative, 1976), among many other films from across the world.

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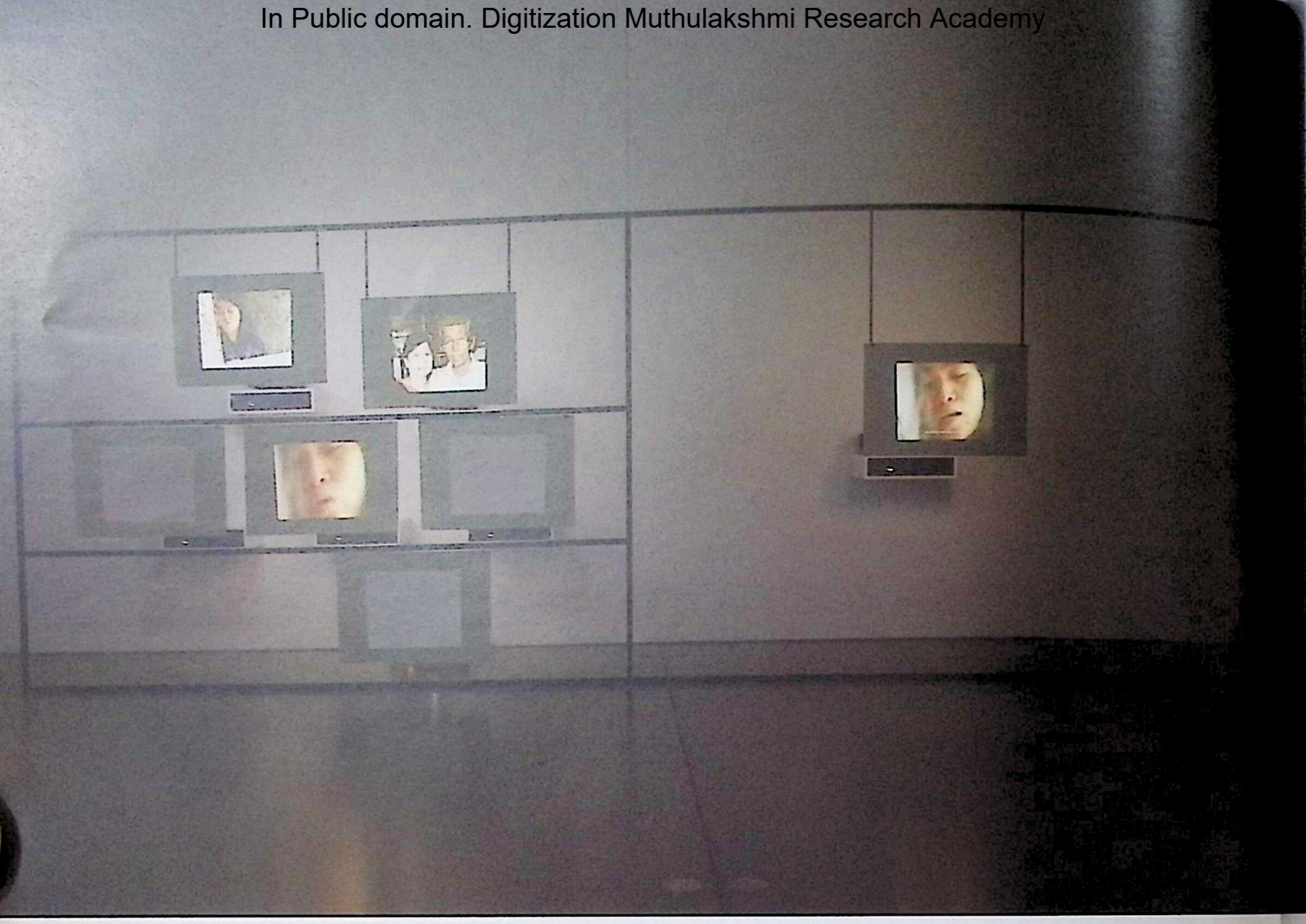

Embracing Doubt

AMAR KANWAR

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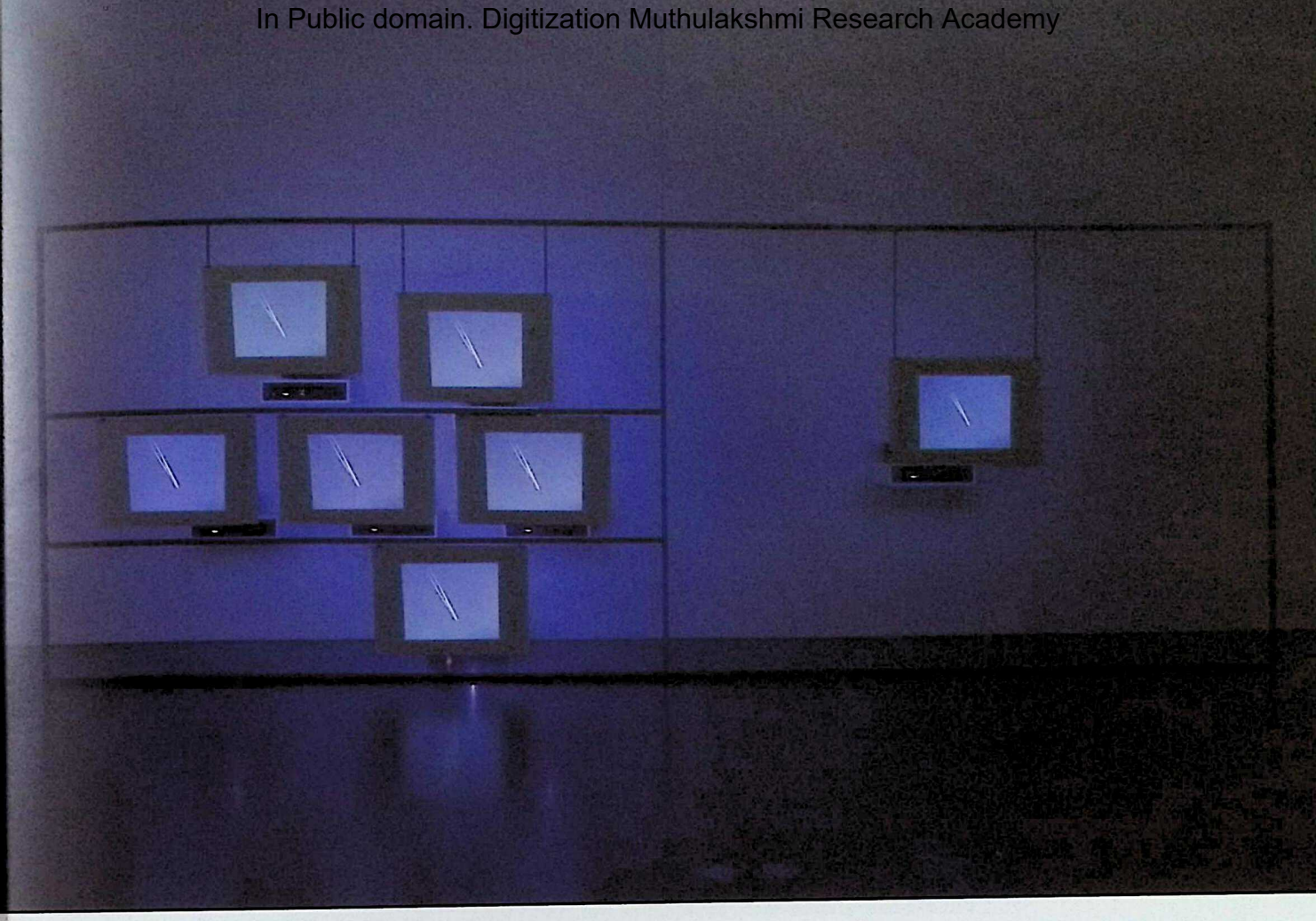

1 and 2
The Torn First Pages,
Amar Kanwar, Haur de Kunst, Munich, 2008. Photographs: Marino Solokhov.

THE "DOCUMENT" OF THE DOCUMENTARY HAS FOR LONG BEEN THROWN UP INTO the air. Is illusion more real than fact? What vocabulary is appropriate for a dream? Can a pamphlet be a poem, a poem be the story of a murder, the murder be recalled as a ballad, and the ballad then become an argument? Can the expression of this argument become a vulnerability which negates the argument itself? Would this lead to shifts in our internal positions?

My work has always seemed to be about doubt. Doubt about the method, about my own inadequacies and the repeated experience of losing voice and finding it again. Almost every film would leave me with a conundrum of difficult feelings and questions. Sometimes the absurd expense of the medium while filming issues about poverty would become a crippling contradiction. At another moment even speaking on someone else's behalf seemed to become incorrect. In the earlier films I would often be confused by expert opinions about the "mind of the common man", entangled by the aspirations and insecurities of revolutionaries, tossed around by dramatically varied audience responses and occasionally stung by the scornful perhaps deliberate indifference of a few peers. Much later I began to squirm at my own expertise in gaining the trust of participants, the interviewees, the fascinating characters that filled the world around me. But most disturbing was the heightened stress of going out to film motivated by the moral fervour of a particular conception, only to come back with pieces of reality that had a mind of their own, and then having to put the excruciating jigsaw together with the desperate hope that it would

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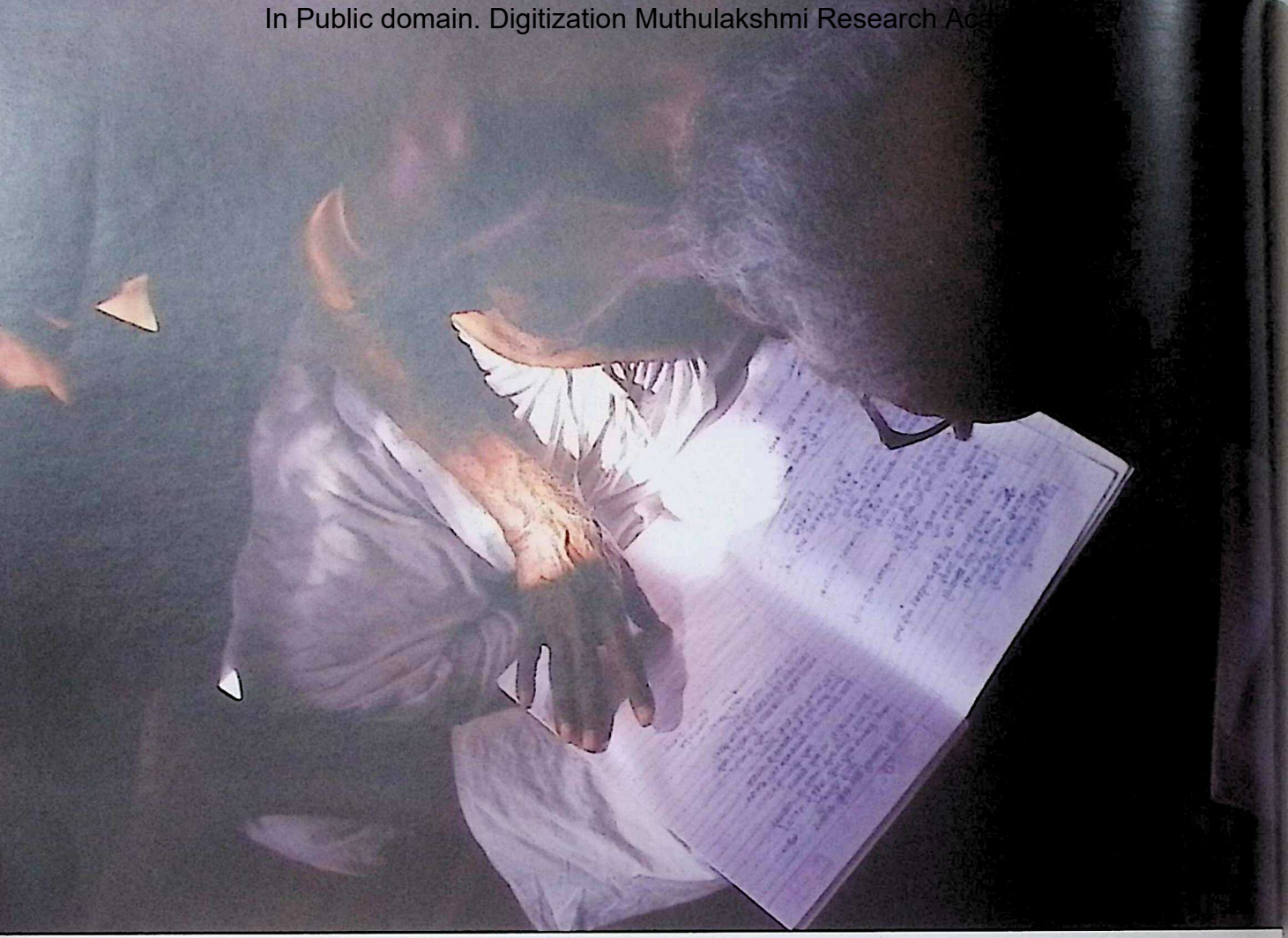

6 and 7
Stills from *A Night of Prophecy*, Amar Kanwar, 2002.

sense of the extreme inequalities and despair caused by violence generated both by the state and social actors in different regions. I felt everyone was bursting forward with arguments and distinct points of view, an extreme super-articulation seemed to be taking place but no one was really listening to the other. It was from this intractable setting that *A Night of Prophecy* developed, a film that sought to address the faultlines of caste, labour, nationality and self-determination. The film was shot in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Kashmir. I had two key questions in mind before I started shooting: Is it possible to understand the passage of time through poetry? And if that were so even momentarily, then would it be possible to see the future? Additionally: Could I use poetry to cut through the super-articulation of ideological positions and prejudices and bring opponents into a zone of comprehension? Would I be able to predict the social/political map of the South Asia of 2040? There were less lofty questions: Why do some images seem sterile and others potent? Could it be because the latter holds a continuously oscillating time? Does such an oscillation of time allow the possibility of multiple interpretations of the image? Another unstated objective was to counter the politics of non-violence earnestly advocated in *A Season Outside*. Counter not necessarily to disagree but to test and confront it with the scale and complexity of the violence that lay in the underbelly of the nation. Was I wrong? The sophisticated and systemic daily violence of untouchability and caste continues to this day. The killings and disappearances continue in Kashmir regardless of the open lessons of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Perhaps we are all destined to a future scenario of cyclical massacres.

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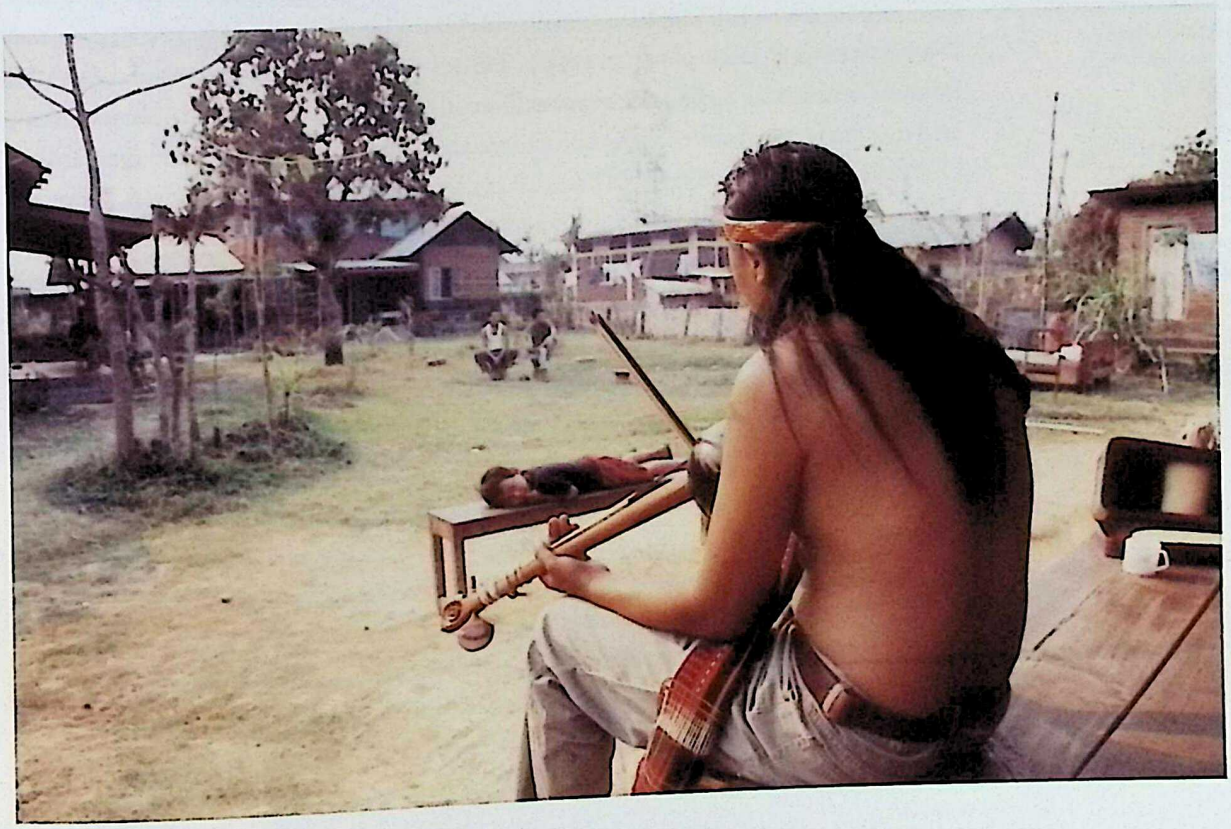
3. 2003–07: Prior to and during the making of To Remember *and* The Lightning Testimonies [*single-projection and 8-projection installations*]

After the sweeping electoral victory of the BJP in Gujarat in 2003, following the Godhra attack and the anti-Muslim riots and killings, it seemed that Gandhi's assassination would need to be commemorated differently. This led to the silent film *To Remember* and also the completion of the trilogy addressing violence: one an essay with spoken prose, the second with 11 languages in poetry, and the third in silence—a formal decision inspired by the *maunvrat* or vow/fast of silence. However the Gujarat riots also threw up another horror: the celebration of brutality, the public spectacle and approbation of sexual violence against Muslim women. How does one respond? How can one talk, show, share anything about this kind of pain? How to not cause survivors and families to revisit the pain while making a film? Several women activists, writers and human rights organizations guided me along the way.

A few key dilemmas from a long list were: How can one identify the gaps in the available narrative? How does one see and represent the different methods of the archiving and recalling of pain? Could there be different images for different kinds of silences? Can a tree, pattern, window be a witness to a crime? How do secrets and testimonies travel, mutate, transform over decades? What is the difference in the nature of comprehension—when time travels chronologically within a narrative and when the viewer has to relate to disparate time but simultaneously? How to tell the process of going along with, through and also beyond the narrative of suffering towards the meaning and strength of resistance? *The Lightning Testimonies* finally included narratives from Punjab, Delhi, Gujarat, Manipur, Nagaland, Maharashtra, Kashmir and Bangladesh from 1947 to 2006.



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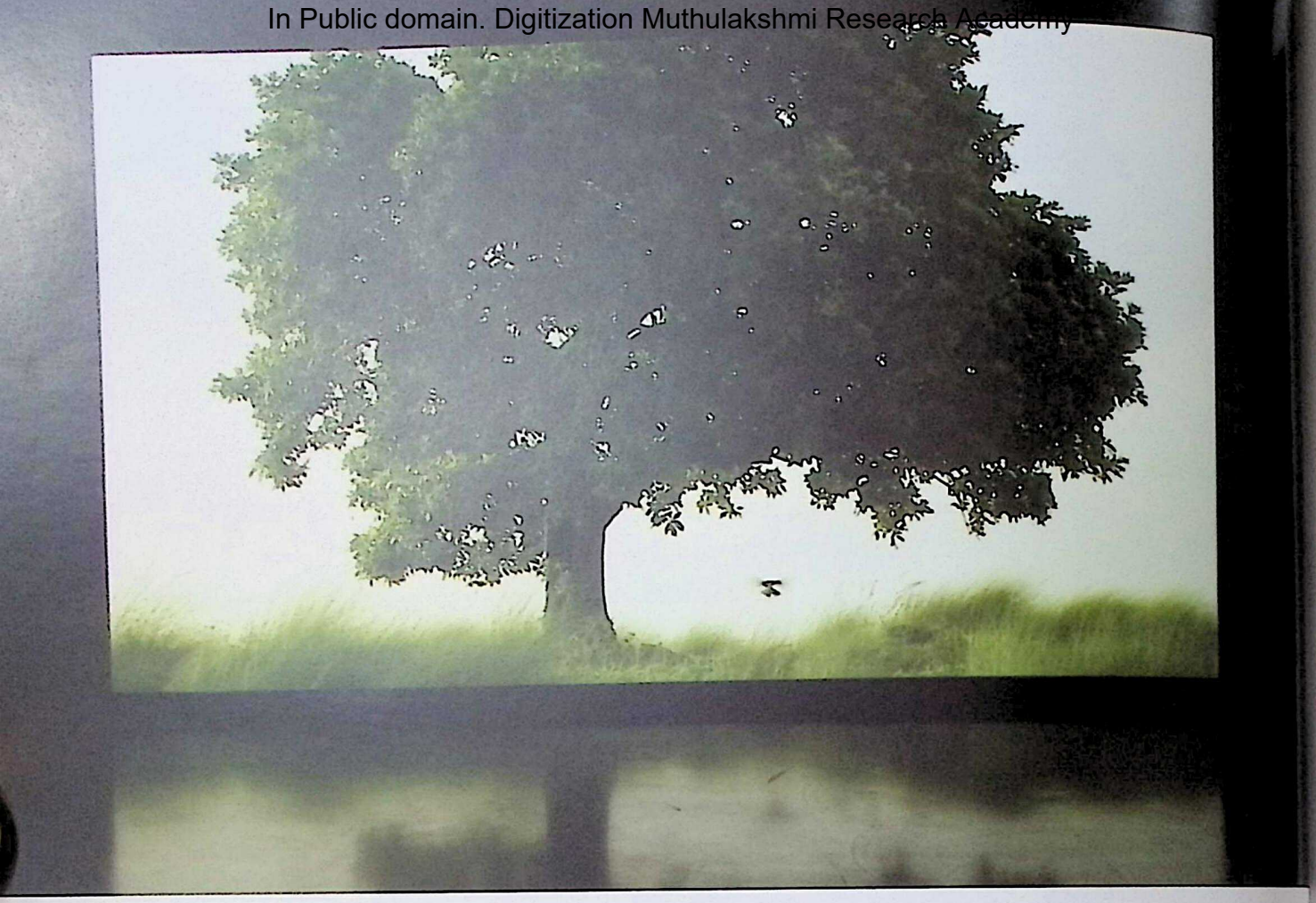

8
The Scene of Crime,
Amar Kanwar, documenta13, Kassel, 2012. Photograph: Henrik Stromberg.

4. 2004–08: Prior to and during the making of The Torn First Pages [*a 19-projection installation that also contains the films* The Face, Thet Win Aung, Win Maw Oo, The Bodhi Tree, *and* Somewhere in May]

There were many motivations to explore Burma: the strength and charisma of several Burmese activists in exile, embarrassment at my own ignorance about this incredible students' movement, the challenge of understanding a courage that persisted regardless of extreme brutality and terrible personal consequences. Thet Win Aung was a student leader arrested in his early 30s in 1998 and sentenced to 59 years in prison, several spent in solitary confinement. How could I even try and respond to the most terrible of punishments, solitary confinement in prison? What image could possibly represent the meaning of that experience of isolation? And finally, as always, the difficulty of filming a political movement. There were several ethnic communities, nationalities within Burma with varied histories and complex and even contradictory political positions. No single story could even come close to telling the scale and spectrum of this epic struggle. I explored three possible routes of comprehension, comprising three parts of the film installation. The hypothesis that developed may be summed up as follows:

Part 1: What if the viewer were to see time separated in its various forms—in real time, slow time, static time, living time, accelerated time and the time of exile?

Part 2: What would happen if it became possible to experience the passage of multiple moments in time simultaneously? Would the simultaneous experience of the absences and interconnections awaken an enhanced and different ability to comprehend?

Part 3: Archival time—the old older oldest presented alongside the new newer newest

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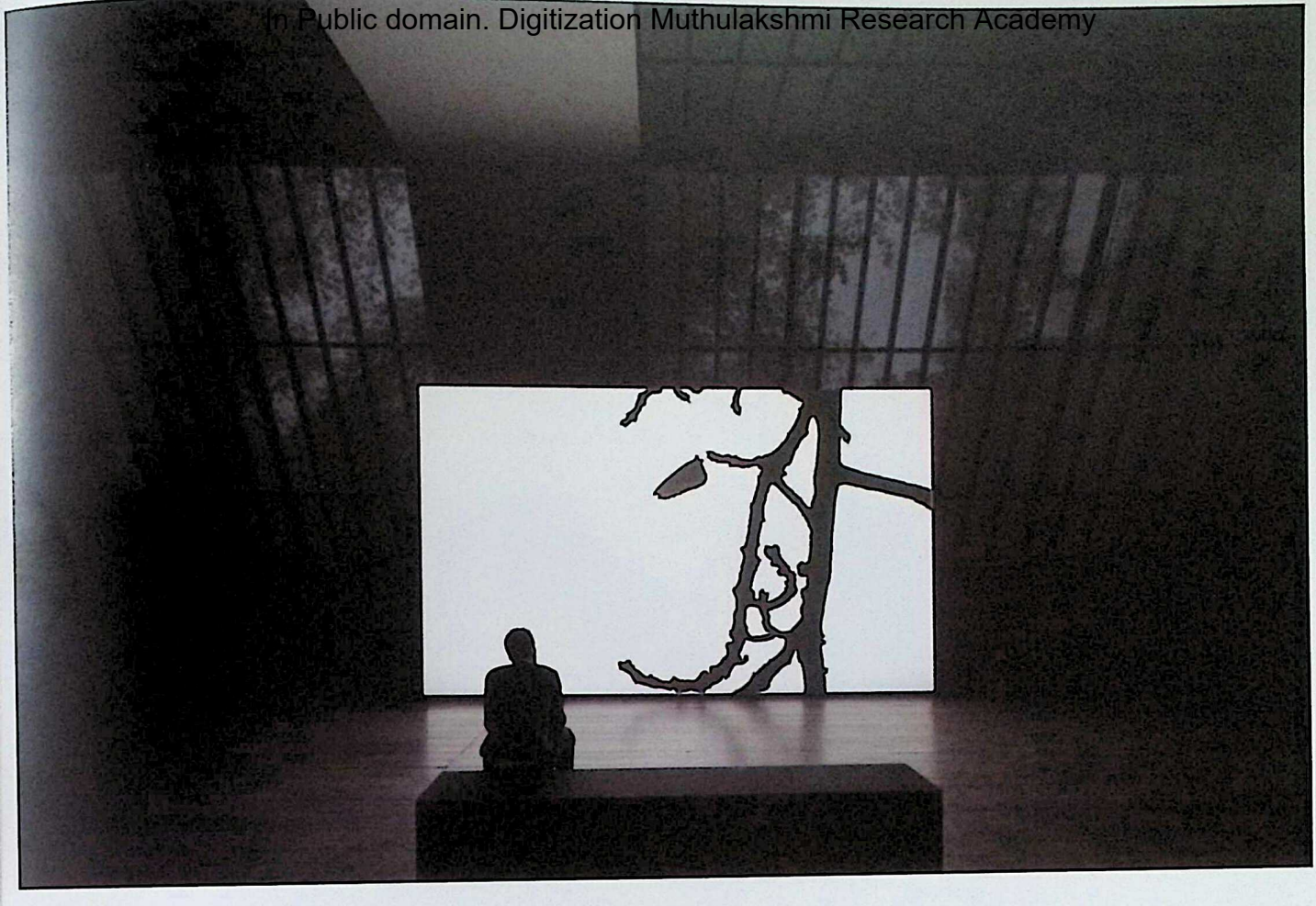

9
The Scene of Crime, Amar Kanwar, TBA-21, Vienna, 2013. Photograph: Stephan Wyckoff.

time. Would a heightened sense of the present moment becoming instantaneously and continuously the past, trigger a reactivation of much older archival time, bring it alive in a certain way, make it suddenly part of the present moment? The conclusions of this experiment with time became *The Torn First Pages*. In the process, a certain kind of comprehension that was not explicit in the work emerged. It allowed me to hazard another speculation, of the viability of poetry as evidence in a war-crime tribunal.

5. 2009–12: Prior to and during the making of A Love Story, The Scene of Crime *and* The Sovereign Forest

Can I make a film where there is no defined objective, no subject, the content of the film is unknown on the first day of the first shoot, and so on? Yearning for the zero position is like a free fall, the absence of control can be terrifying. In the momentary delusion of such an aspiration method emerges: making the decision to shoot, for instance, only light in its varied forms, a certain distillation of the image became possible. Black-and-white could be shot in colour, the eye could be prepared to see in a certain way, the human form became distant and the embedding of any narrative became organically possible. In the resulting film, *A Love Story*, it felt as if only in the deep core of separation could one comprehend the meaning of life. In order to enter this core, perhaps, we needed to slip into a state of mind where we could momentarily see the bareness of the image, of human beings, of the inner life of nature. In the interconnected web of this bareness it suddenly became possible to exist, to express. Almost any narrative embedded here would integrate and find resonance.

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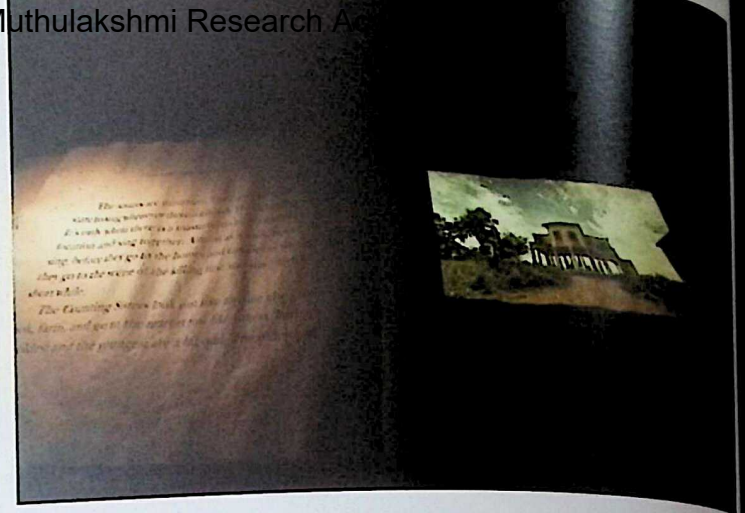

10
Still from *To Remember*, Amar Kanwar, 2003.

11
The Sovereign Forest, Amar Kanwar, Max Mueller Bhavan, Mumbai, 2016. Photograph: Philippe Caalia.

12–15 (OPPOSITE)
The Lightning Testimonies, Amar Kanwar, Max Mueller Bhavan, Mumbai, 2016–17. Photographs: Philippe Caalia.

A Love Story opened the door to *The Scene of Crime*. What if I could look without hierarchies? How to practise that? If the concentrated separation of every inhalation and exhalation could create a sense of unity, then could a separation of every glance also dissolve all divisions, integrate every being, trigger a dramatic awareness of our own existence and transform the way we see the world around us? Again an impractical aspiration led to looking carefully at the terrain of the crime rather than the crime and to then film, for instance, every physical movement within it. But for what purpose?

Central to the notion of crime is the question of evidence. All crimes are investigated by police or the criminal justice system. Subsequently, only evidence that is defined as permissible by the law is allowed to be presented in court—all other evidence is dismissed as invalid. The carefully crafted text of the law tells us what is permissible, how to understand and what to conclude. But what happens if a crime continues to occur regardless of the enormous evidence available? Then is the crime invisible or the evidence invisible, or are both visible but not seen? The moment you ask this question a new set of questions emerge. Perhaps we do not comprehend the crime fully. Is legally valid evidence adequate to understand the meaning and extent of a crime? What if the definition of valid evidence is itself incorrect? What is the scene of crime, what is its footprint? Is the crime always a single cataclysmic event or is it an expanding, accumulating process as well? Which vocabulary can adequately comprehend the scale and extent of a crime? If I do not understand the meaning of loss, its scale, its extent, its multiple dimensions, then how could I even know what it is that is lost? Loss must have, it seems, its own unique language. Be it the loss of land, of voice, of life or of freedom.

These were some of the questions that led to *The Sovereign Forest* within which a poetry of multiple forms of evidence were formally presented. Doubt interrogated intent, which created content that in turn triggered form. Many interconnected routes opened into the scene of crime. A deeper sense of the unknown lay in the chance encounters between inner narratives. A constellation of different comprehensions became possible.

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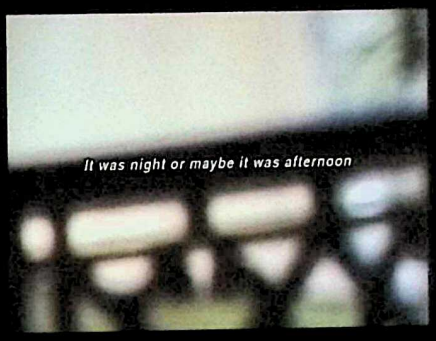

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Seeing, Being and Belonging

RAHUL ROY

I WANT TO DISCUSS SOME ASPECTS OF SEEING, BEING AND BELONGING THAT DOCUMENTARY practice has to contend with in its effort to create meaning through images. One troubling theme for the documentary is its etymological relationship to empiricism. The word documentary itself ties a filmmaker into knots and presents a minefield of questions. To document, to provide evidence, lessons, examples, proof, to teach...these are the root problems that all of us deal with constantly while making documentaries. There is an assumption that the medium is a tabula rasa, and the simple placement and alignment of found objects will generate a set of meanings. Science makes the medium possible and science also gives it meaning by deploying it for its classificatory objectives. However, meaning is a tricky customer.

1 and 2
Stills from *Majma*, Rahul Roy, 2001.

3
Still from *The City Beautiful*, Rahul Roy, 2003.

Meaning which derives from an empiricist approach snatches away the possibility of other ways of being. Science plays with a certain frequency of electromagnetic radiation, light, to make the image manifest itself; but the act of seeing involves a complex range of feelings that allows us access to the unmanifest state of that which becomes manifest. So, in a sense we run into an existential obstacle. There can be no seeing without an image and there can be no image without seeing.

It is through seeing that we realize the possibility and potential of transforming that which we see into an image. And that throws up another challenge: Do we think images or do we see them? What is the relationship between seeing and thinking in the making of a documentary image? Is it pure reason and an array of reasoning that creates an image? If reason allows our consciousness a discerning rationality, where does that leave the irrational? The making of images and their reception, both, we know involve much more than a rational arrangement of reasoned thought. Reason provides the possibility of aligning images to ideologies and political thinking; but it is the irrational flight of imagination, a range of sensory responses and impulses, and the subjective world of emotions, that create the necessary dialectics for the documentary to become an art form. The tendency

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4
Still from *The City Beautiful*, Rahul Roy, 2003.

to overburden the image with reason and meaning threatens our ability to access the unmanifest; but the threat of the image's dissolution into the subjective and intuitive world of the sensory must also be held in check, and in my opinion it is in this balancing that the documentary moment is born.

This magical moment both marks the image with subjectivity and composes it within the social. In that single moment it is a creation that cannot be cloned because both creator and the object have changed since then, and the being of that moment has been stored for posterity into an image. I suggest this urges us to reframe the longstanding bid to understand and mark out the geographies of the fictional and the documentary. There have been various arguments about what constitutes the difference, along the lines of actors and non-actors, scripted and non-scripted, the real and the set. But perhaps what needs to be explored is this aspect of the moment and the impossibility of the moment, of time, to recur; it can be recreated but then it is no longer a documentary but fiction.

David MacDougall has argued that the documentary is an empirical art form that deals with found objects. He refers here to how the filmmaker aligns a whole network of objects, human and non-human, to create meaning.[1] I find in my own experience as a filmmaker that the aspect of time is much more significant; it adds another dimension to thinking through the documentary form. Can we argue that documentary is an attempt to align found objects in relation to time? This offers a more dynamic way of looking, because no single object remains the same after the passing of each moment; time amongst other things is also change imprinted onto our minds, it provides the coordinates for movement, it is

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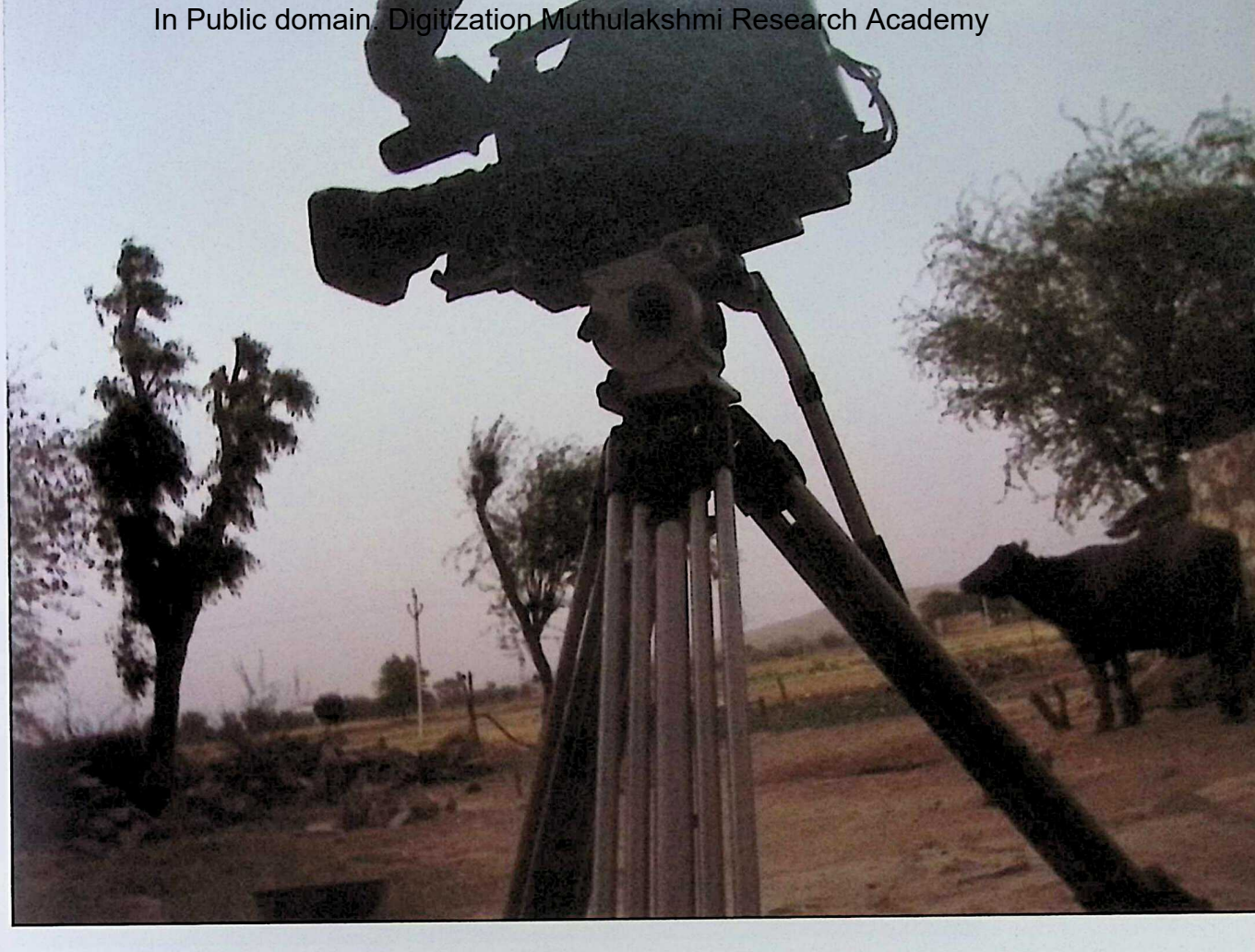

5
Camera on a tripod during the production of an untitled documentary by Rahul Roy in 2009. Photograph: Asheesh Pandya.

a thoroughfare traversed by change. The documentary is that dynamic moment or series of moments that charts the progress of found objects in time. The dynamism refers not only to the autonomous being of the object but also to the presence of the filmmaker, the documentary form becoming a dance in which both participate.

The rhythm of this dance is provided by an encounter of changing perceptions that grow out of time spent together. It provides the potential of an ever-changing fluidity to the way we see, the way the image is created and the way in which the object reveals itself. In the documentary there are no constants, no freezing of time; each moment influences the next. The movement of perceptions is also that of meaning: a forever lost fragment in lived time may reappear in the moving image as immortal, enabling us to be conscious, to connect to our own being through the being of others, to create our own being and that of the others.

I was recently watching an interview of a Ugandan peasant woman filmed by a friend. She is part of a community on an island almost entirely bought by a corporation that intends to produce biofuel and uproot and throw out the community of peasants who have been farming there for several decades. At a poignant moment during the interview she says that the corporation has snatched away her right to be human. That is the great potential of the documentary—to humanize people, to provide them an opportunity to reveal their being—and this always comes before human rights. When human rights skip the very important first step of imbuing people with the quality of being, creating the space for their autonomy, they are of little use, and so too are documentary practices which collude with an ideological

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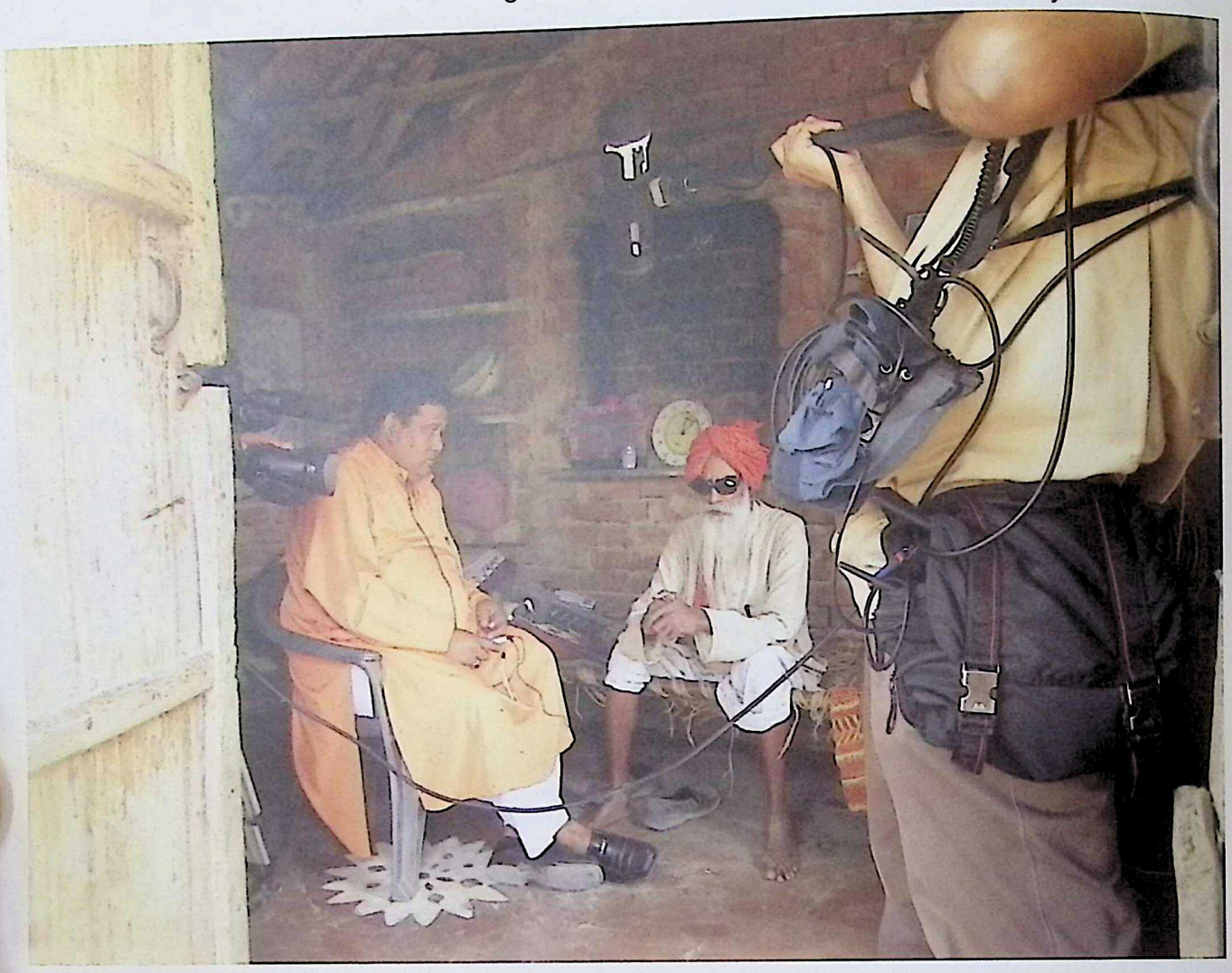

6
Scene during the production of an untitled documentary by Rahul Roy, 2009. Photograph: Asheesh Pandya.

7
Still from *When Four Friends Meet*, Rahul Roy, 2000.

8
Still from *The Factory*, Rahul Roy, 2015.

emphasis on rights rather than an engagement with specific forms of human existence.

Another theme to consider is how the problems posed by space can be resolved through image-making. In the context of image-making, we are familiar with the space of narratives, physical spaces, the space of signification and the aural space. Film space which seeks to contain spaces that threaten to dart in different directions is based on the principle of disambiguation. That is, it needs to show the links amongst these spaces, put them in order to create accurate meaning. Film space itself cannot be seen, it can only be perceived as the space where found objects and events are channelled to generate meaning. Disambiguation makes discourse possible and provides a certain coherence to experience. So, how do filmmakers deal creatively with a filmic ordering of space which bears the spectre of ambiguity? It is an ethical issue because without ambiguity we create an authoritarian discourse, a space that forces a singular meaning. The documentary form has to resist its historical and scientific roots that push it towards the authoritative certainty of mathematics, science and ideology.

Some of the struggles associated with meaning-making in documentary practice lie in the peculiar place assigned to words. Some critics argue that these two languages, of words and of film, are different and have distinct epistemic possibilities. However, I would suggest film shares a very close relationship to words. At various moments, words mediate documentary practice in ways that both set boundaries and open doors. It can be argued that the area of intersubjectivity in documentary practice relies on words and associated

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ways of generating meaning. Conversations, negotiations, explanations, permissions occupy a central place in documentary practice; but they may or may not occupy film space. Let me in this context quote from Barthes who says: "once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing', I instantaneously make another body for myself, transform myself in advance into an image."[2] This statement reasserts the corporeality of the object but, unsurprisingly, does not engage the aspect of practice. I would argue that it is not just the act of being observed by the lens but the wider mode of documentary practice which relies on words that may contribute to this state of transformation. The dialogic on the other hand is the space where practice speaks to itself and thereby provides us with the glimmer of a language that refuses to stay subservient to the hegemony of words.

As a practitioner, what has surprised me are the reams written on realism and the documentary while there is an intriguing silence on magical realism and the documentary. I would argue that the concept of magical realism could have been invented for the documentary but has not even skimmed the practice and its discourses. There is a hyper-reality to the documentary form gestured to by such commonly used phrases as "the magical documentary moment", "the fantastic in the mundane everyday", all of which point to a certain discomfort among practitioners as well as film theorists: they fail to acknowledge that the disjunction key to magical realism is structurally present in the documentary. If at all, experiments relate to surrealism rather than magical realism which is grounded in hard material reality. The reasons are obvious. The surreal does not take the documentary away from its claims to realism; rather it supplements it by psychologizing the inner world to archive the inexpressible, the unconscious etc. Magical realism on the other hand would subvert its truth claims. I think the future for documentary practice especially in the non-West lies in opening a new register of magical realism.

NOTES

1 David MacDougall, private conversation with author, Delhi, November 2008.

2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), pp. 10–11.

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Reflections on "the Political" in Indian Documentary Films

SURABHI SHARMA

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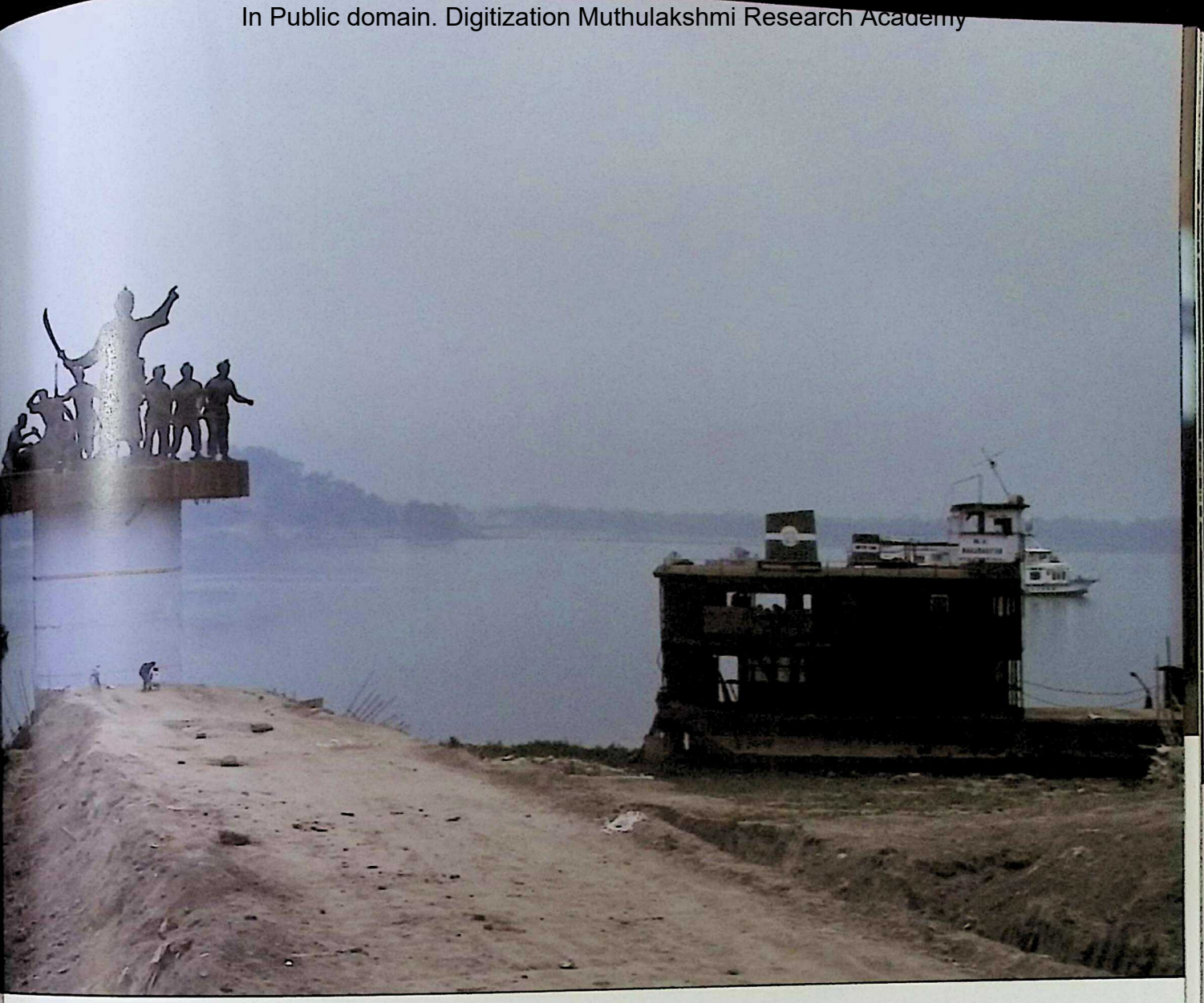

(Ext./mid-day/mid-shot) The back of the head of a young man.

THE SOUND OF BAMBOO LEAVES RUSTLING IN THE WIND INDICATES THAT THIS IS not a still, but a film sequence. This almost-freeze-frame opening shot is held for close to half a minute followed by text memorializing a date in 2017. We are informed that the filmmaker asked his friend to pose in a uniform borrowed from a dead United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) boy's family. The friend putting on the uniform is now framed in extreme long shot, again with his back to the camera. Text continues. It informs us that the friend asks who he should act like—there were so many known faces among the dead. We now see the friend in long shot, standing to attention, his back to the camera yet again. "He posed for all the known faces from our childhood," says the text. These three shots span almost two minutes of screen-time.

Mukul Haloi's *Loralir Sadhukotha/Tales from Childhood* is not eager to "show" or "tell"; instead it uses the formal qualities of film to express personal impressions of a politically-

1–5 (FOLLOWING PAGES)
Stills from *Loralir Sadhukotha/Tales from Childhood*, 2017. Courtesy Mukul Haloi.

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charged context—Assam of the 1990s was a time of the overwhelming presence of the army and the killing of young ULFA foot-soldiers, often the filmmaker's intimates and "known faces". It uses a significant amount of text—occasionally Haloi's own reflections, sometimes a poem or a fragment of a letter, and conversations with family members and with childhood friends who grew up with him in Nalbari, the hotbed of the separatist movement.

Three-fourths into the film the filmmaker goes back to his school and films a group of students hoisting the Indian flag and singing the national anthem from a distance. Haloi says he has no memory of such a celebration in his years of growing up. The shot is held long, for three full minutes, in a fixed frame, far from the "action". Preceding this shot is another long shot of schoolgirls, herded by teachers, chanting "Zindabad Zindabad" and carrying a banner declaring "Let's make this 70th Independence-day celebration successful". The girls enter the frame at a distance and walk out of the frame close to the camera. This shot is held for almost two minutes.

Following this there is a long sequence in almost complete darkness as a car drives through the night. The filmmaker converses with a friend who does most of the talking as they reflect on the confusion they faced as kids, unsure which side was spilling blood for their benefit. The film ends with the friend dressed in the borrowed ULFA uniform lying at the edge of a lake. The film captures the disappearance of a "known face", and a profound disengagement from warring ideologies and the overpowering symbols of state power.

The extraordinary length of the shots suggests a preoccupation with the philosophical possibilities of the longue durée. Haloi's use of long takes—shots that are evocative but not evidentiary—focuses attention on the act of looking itself, and emphasizes the self-reflexive dimension of his practice. The nation-state is a looming, imposing, threatening presence, one that presides over the deliberate dissipation of hope.

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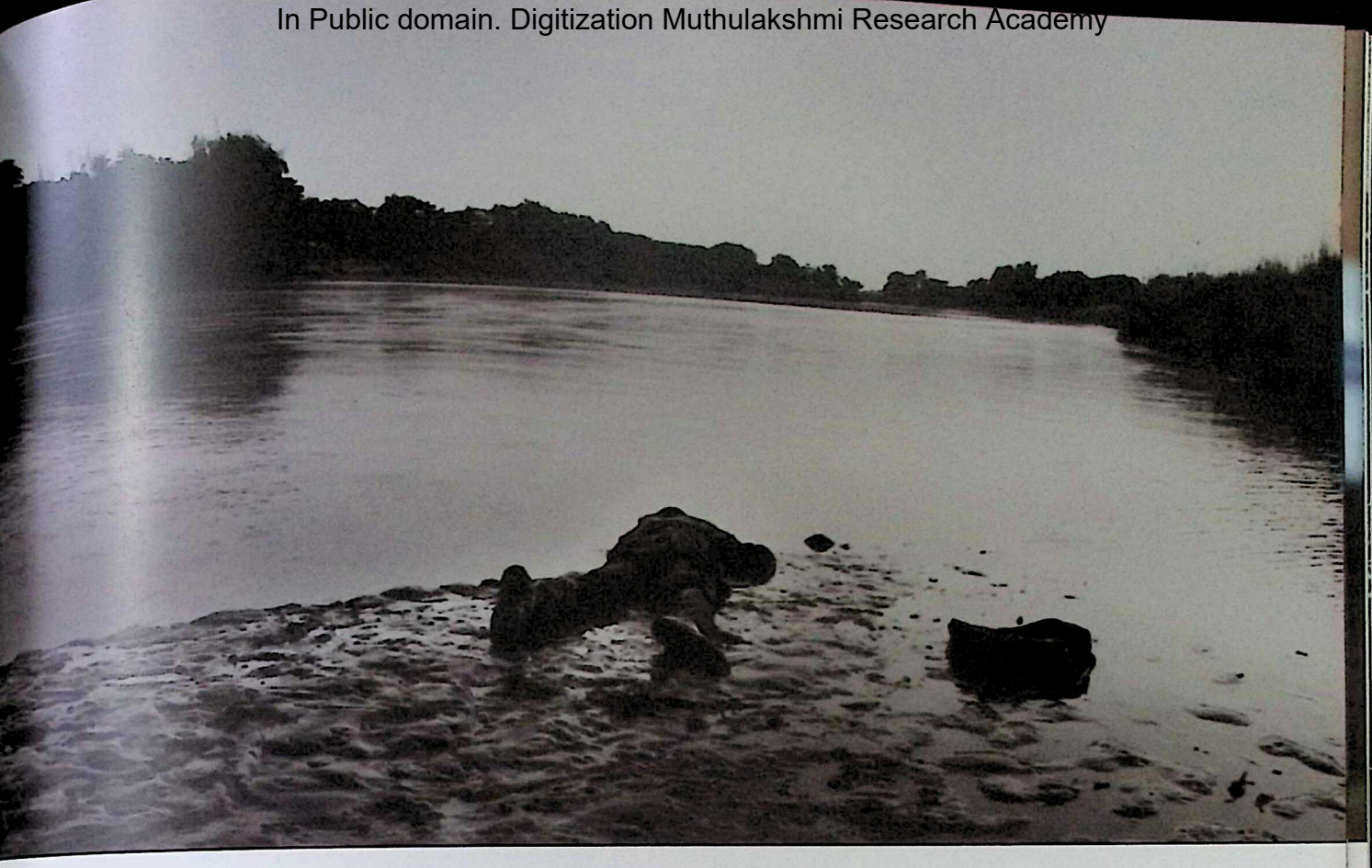

This first documentary of an FTII-trained filmmaker might seem an unlikely choice to reflect on the changing character of the political impulse in Indian documentary film practice. *Tales from Childhood* (69 mins, 2017) marks a shift away from two dominant genres of political documentary—the essay-film and the character-driven narrative film.

The latter is a cinematic mode committed to engaging its audience through identification and heightened emotions generated by the thrill of drama or conflict. It is easier to consume even when its subjects are located in disturbing and depressing conditions. This commitment to making the film compelling and easy to relate to facilitates its circulation in the international television and film-festival market. This is a humanist vision that often uses orientalist tropes to tell a universal story where the individual's struggle to overcome or survive social contexts is appreciated as convincing storytelling.

In contrast the more established form of political filmmaking in India often deployed the essay mode in which historical context could not be separated from contemporary conflict. In this form, the tragedy of the individual is embedded in analysis and reflection, not the drama of pathos. For instance films like *Bombay—Our City*, *Something Like a War*, *Voices of Baliapal*, the multiple films made on the Narmada anti-dam movement, the recent *Red Ant Dream*, and films on the groups protesting nuclear plants and other environmental disasters put forward an argument that draws from the ideology of the movements. These landmark films offer a compelling and rich context around the issue apart from capturing the energy and hope that defined the movements. These films are invaluable records of contemporary history particularly because they build on testimonies of the affected communities.

Mukul Haloi's film cannot be classified as either one or the other of these two documentary forms. It does not mobilize the characteristic features of narrative documentary—exposition of a crisis, confrontation and denouement. *Tales from Childhood* also breaks

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away from the mode of filmmaking representing a social movement or issue-based protests by political groups.

Assam and its violent past figure centrally in this young filmmaker's quiet film, but he chooses to locate the bloody conflict in memory rather than history, and a shifting memory at that. He uses the possibilities and provocations offered by film to disarrange the politics suggested by incomplete memories from his childhood. The diaphanous white curtain that obstructs the camera's view of the ULFA activist attending a meeting in the present is an image-metaphor for the clouding of both memory and the contemporary. The filmmaker provokes us to doubt what he is seeing, how he remembers.

This is not a film that looks at a political formation from within, nor is it observing from the outside. Here is a filmmaker reflecting on an uneasy truce, on imperceptible wounds. The truce is between perception and its object, in which the filmmaker refuses to use film as transparent testimony, employing an aesthetics of distance to navigate and complicate the political.

Unlike personal films that often follow the grammar of the character-driven film, Haloi forges a different relationship with the subject of his film, the separatist movement that has defined his land since his childhood. His sensitivity to film language enables him to reflect on his uncertain but deep connection with the movement. However his identification with the movement is not what compels him to make the film. It is his filmmaking that gives him the space to express the meaning or meaninglessness of the identification. Every frame creates the space for the audience to experience his dissonance.

The nature of filmmakers' engagement with potential funders or funding has a significant bearing on the kinds of political films made by the independent documentary community in India. A fellowship for early-career filmmakers from the Tata Institute of

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Social Sciences (TISS) enabled Haloi to make this film on his own terms while he was registered as a student in a film school. International commissioning editors and festival programmers, on the other hand, tend to hone the "universal" in documentary films made in the global South. The local has to be distilled to make it available for worldwide consumption. Key plot points and character development form a clear narrative arc, making the film marketable in the television and film festival circuit. This emphasis on tropes used by mainstream fiction films enables the documentary film to transform the lives of ordinary people into vivid stories unfolding within the drama of strife or deprivation. In valorizing individual heroism, however, this narrative choice limits our understanding of the political, and the possible disruption of the status quo.

Funding options for activist filmmakers include supporters of the movement and organizations sympathetic to the cause. These sources of funding shape the film differently. Here the emphasis is on clarifying and sharpening the debate and making the context visible to identify the attack on rights and justice. This enables the movement to put forward a counter-narrative to the one offered by the mainstream power centre. This foregrounds the idea that films are tools to engage an audience through debate and pedagogy.

Haloi is embedded in the political debates of his time. His film emerges from an investment in the ideas and emotions of his location but he chooses to eschew an expositional form that would *explain* the context to his audience. He also resists the urgency to participate in the political process he reflects on, and he rejects the idea that conflict is a *plot-point* to help you identify and keep you engaged. This is both a personal film and a political one, one in which the person concerned is the filmmaker, and the film as aesthetic and political technology intervenes in the politics of our times.

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Documentary as Pedagogic Practice

SAMEERA JAIN

In the early '80s, on completing film school, some of us went to Bombay with eyes sparkling and ambitions somewhat clear. But some of us became marginal. Simply because we never managed to convincingly feel mainstream, we moved to the periphery. Very little lay at the periphery then. Amongst the few things, there was documentary.

The amazing work of the pioneers of independent Indian documentary put the spotlight on current political predicaments. We clutched at this straw, immediate and important. For the rest, we had to contend with the tropes of non-fiction. The delineation, the investigation, the education, the reinforcement of an already-known position, the rhetoric, the propaganda, and of course the embellished information. Occasionally ambiguity, poetry, insight embedded in a form that was not dictatorial or argumentative, but helped experience and understand.

After a screening, an eager film student/teacher would ask, "What was the message of this film?" or "How can this film change society?" These questions were never asked of fiction cinema, literature (fiction or non-fiction), music and the other arts. As if documentary carries a burden that nothing else does, not even journalism, its near cousin. Documentary is not a story, not art, not imaginative, not subjective. It is concrete, solid, unambiguous, invulnerable, and as far away from poetry as possible.

The superior position of the documentarist as a bearer of the factual account, supported by the document, the testimony and the distilled informed voice, seemed to be a given.

We learners and teachers started to foreground certain questions. How do we recognize and accept the multiple messaging of non-fiction, the interpretations of reality stranger than fiction? And how do we discuss what non-fiction cinema can do, in its engagement with the aesthetics and politics of the representation of reality?

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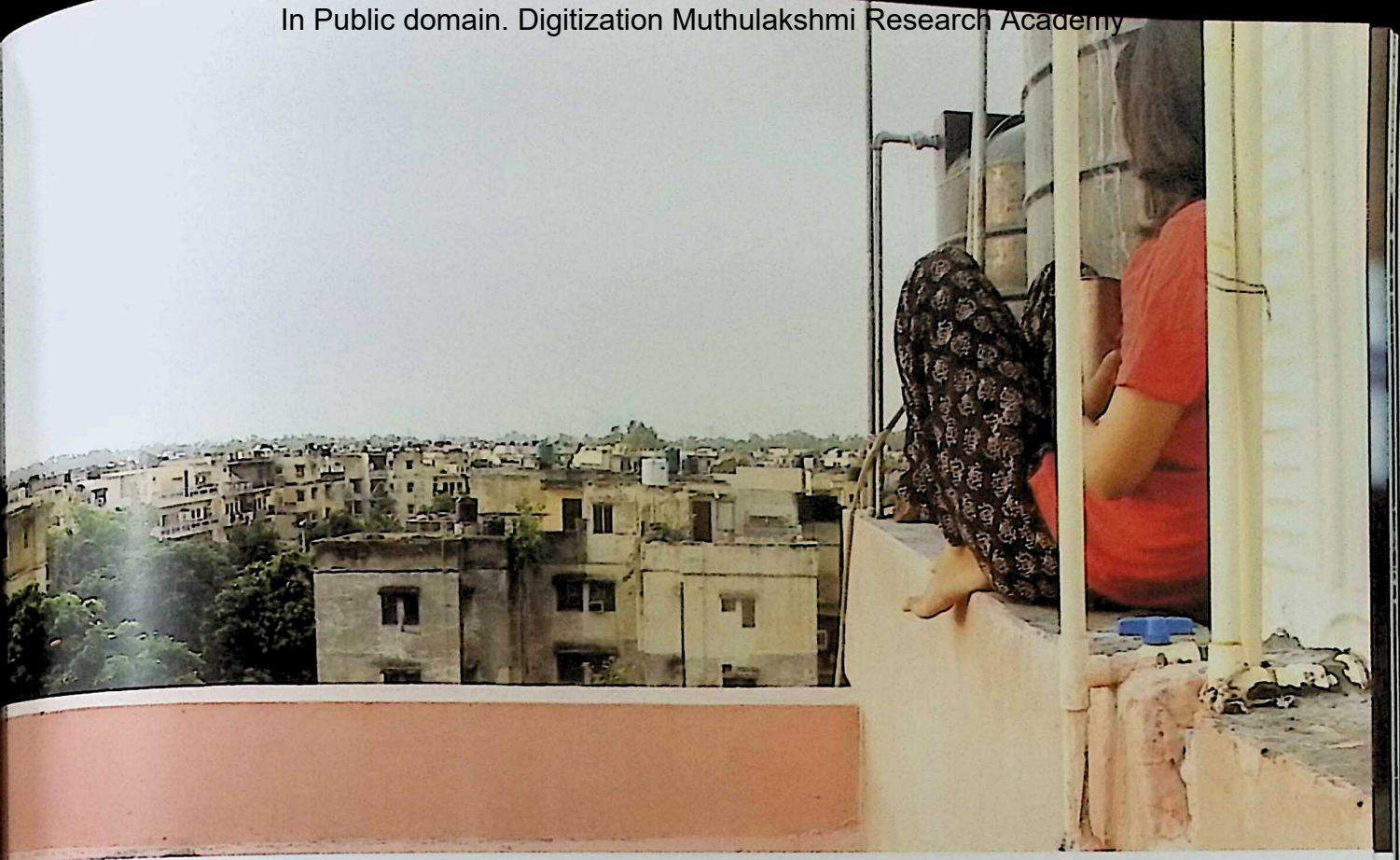

1
Still from *Khoj*,
Akshika Chandna, 2013.

Some hurdles appear repeatedly. Overwhelmingly, there is the truth claim, cinema's inherent indexicality supporting the perception that the filmed document is completely "factual".

Another is the propensity to seek the unusual, the exceptional, even the shocking. The depiction of forbidden or "secret" territories of various kinds (the ethnographic "other", the lives of the lesser privileged...) offer ways to attract an audience that prefers fiction. Sometimes, such exercises are no more than aestheticized peep-shows.

These preoccupations could obscure the layered politics of our lives and times, and the possibility of looking at "our own kind" too, as Rouch and Morin did in the 1960s.[1]

An investigation of the politics inscribed in various ethnographic modes discloses much about the construction of perspective, about ways of framing and formulations of beauty in the image; these could be open to question and reinvention. And always, the role of the archival. Most often used as a pure, unsullied representation of history, supporting the documentary argument with its weighty presence, our passport to truth. In *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992), Harun Farocki uses the archive not to support and validate a position, but to analyse, deconstruct, form and find a new way of looking at the present.

***

Rid myself of the accumulated errors and un-truths. Get to know my resources, make sure of them.[2]

We start from scratch, step by step, sift between borrowed and unborrowed conceptions, tropes and structures, and look for the real sources of our ideas, tracing our conceptual, emotional, historical journeys. We also note what we don't want to do. Occasionally we're left with nothing, or only with vague notions. "What is my film about?" the student asks, with some desperation. A documentary is supposed to be about something: an issue, a topic, a phenomenon.

For instance: My film is about Daryaganj. No, it's about Hindi typewriters, as I came upon them in Daryaganj. No, it's about the second-hand book bazaar. No, it's about how

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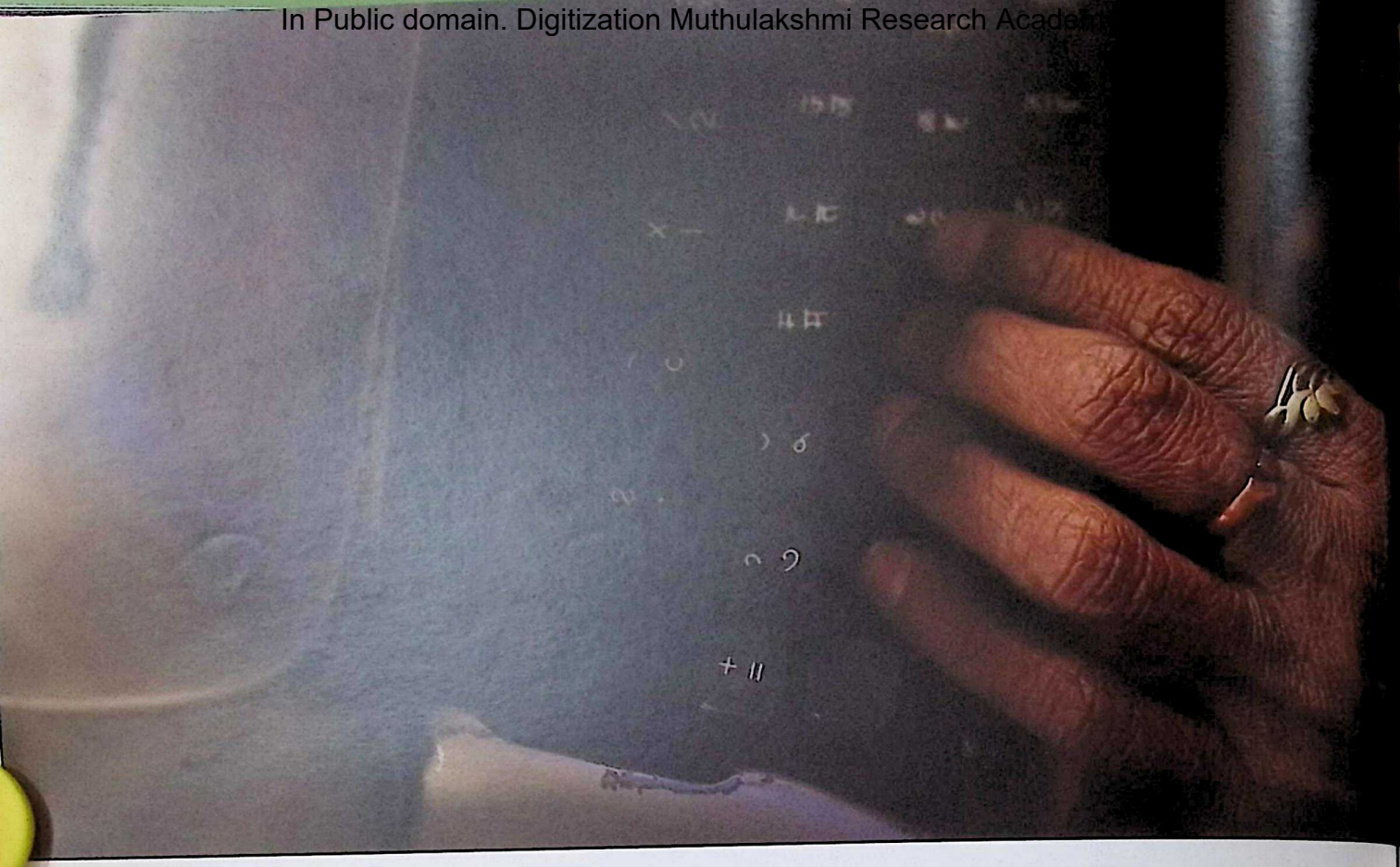

2 and 3
Stills from *After Word*, Mallika Visvanathan, 2017.

stories, books, emotions and connections will never be irrelevant, useless or obsolete. But how can it be about all these things? Doesn't seem right for a documentary....

***

Both student and teacher wish it were simpler to find frames for reality, as with history, sociology, economics, politics, psychology. But it doesn't seem right, the solutions seem too neat for my film. The film doesn't want to say things already said; to be just a well-argued work of information with both sides judiciously represented. Where am I in this? What process will I go through? Will it affect me in any way? And what about my viewer? Is there any vital conversation, any real movement in the way the film is received? Does the film matter to anyone? Has it been "seen" even before it was made?

Get things away from habit, de-chloroform them.[3]

Searching for personal impetus may help de-chloroform. Why does she want to make this film? The answers are not clear, there are either too many answers or too few.

It's time to feel worthless, empty, devoid of legitimate purpose, lack the faintest hope of a structure. Let's try readymade frameworks, just for some respite: trace the history, search the location, look for a protagonist. Let's try interviewing three people, and intercut; find out how many dimensions exist around this phenomenon, and juxtapose. The same formulations and tropes surge up again, beckoning, tantalizing: just do it again, no need to unlearn.

***

How is the form in non-fiction to be found? What's the connection between content and form? Which guides the other? Are they the same or different? Are the aesthetic, technique and meaning all working together, and if so **how is that relationship to be found?**

We listen to people who have experienced and explored their craft, and not just in cinema. To see if something helps us realize our own work, if not as a direct result, then sometime in the future.

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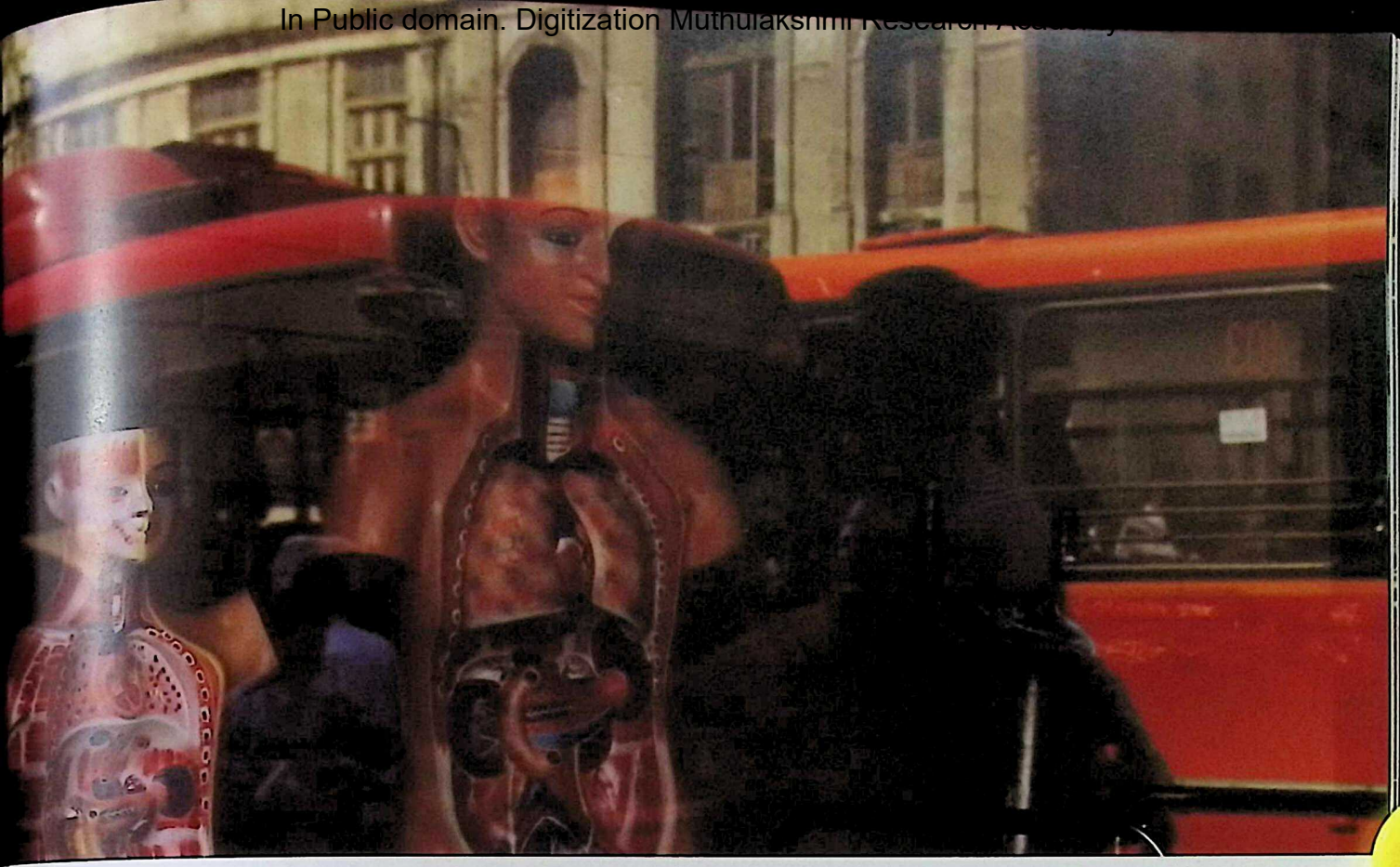

Performance theorist Rustom Bharucha spoke to us about his work with the folklorist and ethnomusicologist Komal Kothari. In the book that followed a series of conversations between the two, Kothari speaks of the story of the Chida-Chidi narrated by an aunt in early childhood.[4] A pair of birds swing on a string above a well. One day the string breaks and they fall into the well. Kothari says the story made a very strong impression on him; yet later in adulthood he just couldn't recall the whole of it, try as he might. Suddenly one day, there was a vivid recall, and with this arrived the understanding that the birds hadn't died, they had simply flown away.

"What a relief that moment was for me, because I realized that the birds were alive." Why did his aunt, who told this story repeatedly, never state this? "As I understand it today, I would say that we, as listeners have to realize that the birds flew away. The teller of the tale, in this case my aunt, is not meant to give us the meaning of the story."

While collecting children's stories he discovered that "in no folk story whatsoever is anything like a moral or a maxim added to the story itself. Folk stories were never meant as teaching aids, which is how they are being used these days. Basically, I would say they were taken to be some sort of realization—but you must be prepared to 'realize' your answers, not necessarily when you hear the story for the first time but in any point in your life."

As non-fiction cinema students we listen keenly. Perhaps the narrative could avoid closure within the film, carry into life, and be allowed to signify something more lasting.

***

Rustom notes: "With Komalda's discourse I have noticed one thing—the more it spread at a spatial level, incorporating all kinds of connections along the way, the more one is likely to find some insight into a particular phenomenon...[his] discourse is most resonant when it is not constrained within the point-by-point argumentation of a particular position... representative of another mode of thinking."[5]

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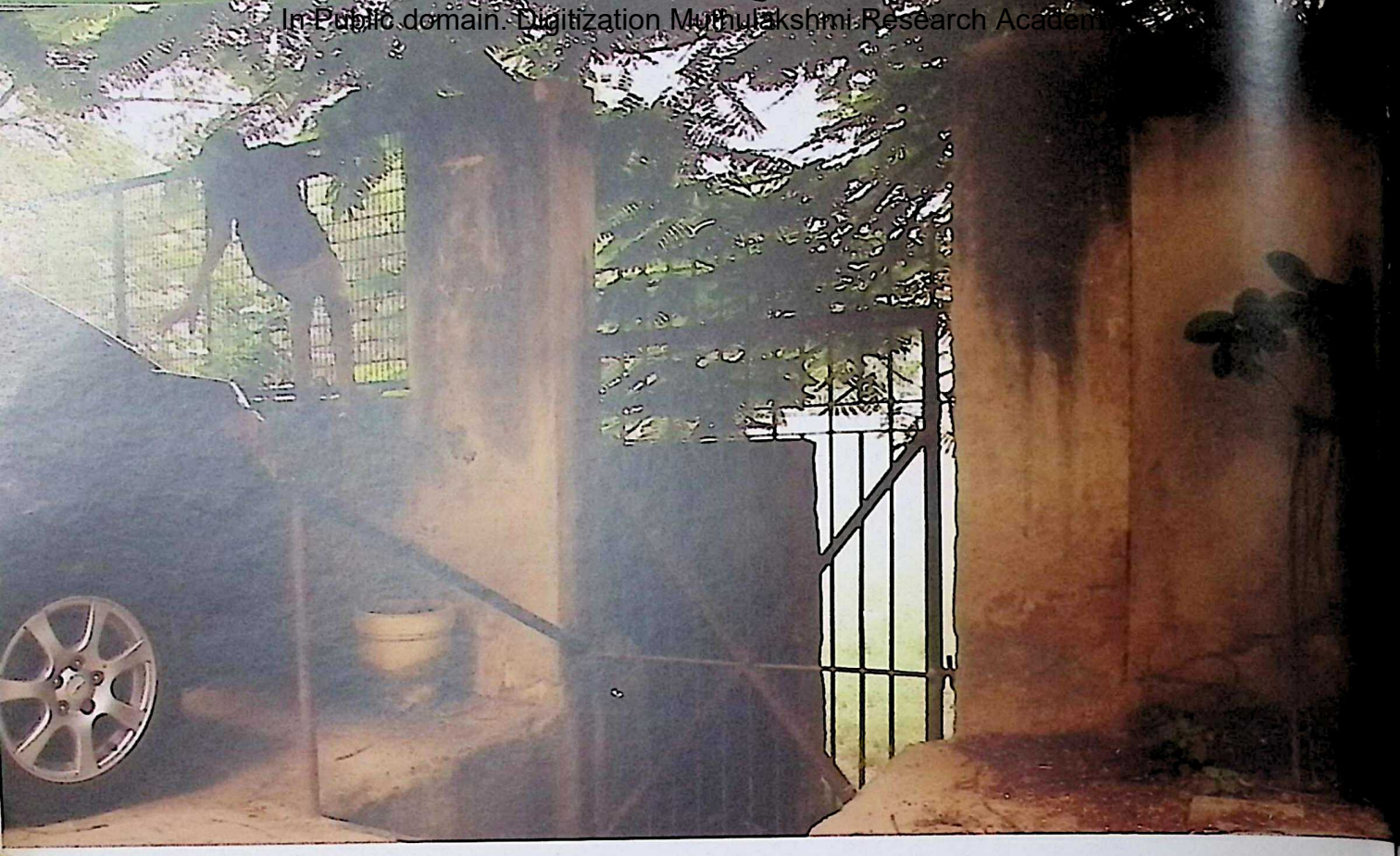

4
Still from *Looking Through the Fence*, Akanksha Gupta and Vasuki Chandak, 2016.

5
Still from *Koi Dekhne Wala Hai* (Is Anyone Watching?), Shilpi Saluja, 2014.

Art historian Kavita Singh discusses miniature painting, and its several narrative devices.[6] She describes continuous narration, a non-linear view of time, new and economical means of laying out characters, how the form helps the eye move across in a temporal sequence, and why the painter found or chose such a form. She also addresses painting as reportage, different mappings of time onto space, the mono-scenic narrative, the privilege a painter can give to a particular moment, the various possibilities of perspective, and more.

***

TV, unexpectedly, can provide insight and inspiration. In February 2016 the TV screen on NDTV turns black for 40 minutes. News anchor Ravish Kumar speaks of the inability to "show" anything, as television news recurrently presents similar images, rendering them meaningless. Accusations of anti-nationalism against JNU students the same month were echoed by many television channels using terrifying demagoguery, and Ravish does not wish to allow such a descent into travesty. His form comes from his interpretation: "*Yeh andhera hi aaj ki TV ki tasveer hai*" (This darkness is the picture of television today).

He also "interviews" two mime artists on the heels of a ban on NDTV for airing "strategically sensitive details" regarding the Pathankot terror attack. A minister had been reported as saying that the "habit" of questioning the authorities and the police "should stop". Ravish and the mimes satirize which questions a "person of authority" would like to be asked, and which not. The programme becomes a reflection on free speech, silence and the state.

"When we cannot ask questions, when we cannot speak freely, what can we do?" Use the very language that those we disagree with use? Or is there another way?

***

Amongst our many inspirations are the Iranian filmmakers who made films of eloquent and lasting meaning during extreme censorship in their country. We listen to all these storytellers. Hopefully their research, attention to detail and rigour transmits, and improves us a little.

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The familiar documentary tropes pale in comparison. We explore them, deconstruct, and take what is useful for us. Sometimes established templates transcend themselves. Such are the conversations in *Citizen Four* (Laura Poitras, 2014), somehow a little reminiscent of Jafar Panahi's *This Is Not a Film* (2011). The white of the hotel bedsheets, the diffused lamplight in the room, the extended exchanges, the strong sense of real time—these are all part of a film that displays no overt experimentation or artistry, but finds a quiet form all its own, with Snowden as its pale-faced, gentle, strong hero.

We interrogate the interview form: are we meant to make our "subjects" comfortable? Instead, can we reflect on what makes "us" comfortable, inverting the equation of power and altering the conventions of representation?

How does awareness of the performative, our own and that of the "subject", affect our work? And what of the voice-over, traditionally the all-knowing voice that turns documentary into an illustrated lecture? Instead, can voice become a character much as in fiction, carrying nuance and complexity?

Definitions of fiction and documentary keep blurring, in many ways.

***

When we're stuck, we start to experiment, playfully. We collect images, sounds and narratives. All the researching and exploring flood us, even as we search for our intent within these collections.

***

A student wants to make a film about a river. Why? The river is in bad shape, all the arguments for saving it are obvious. Let's discuss this in the film. Why? Because. What a question! Because it's the right thing to do. For whom? For all of us. But you already know that, so this is going to be pre-digested information, put out in the most palatable way? Why? To educate? To create a document that will stand up to scrutiny? Then why not a book or an illustrated pamphlet? Useful objectives, but others have done it better, so why a film?

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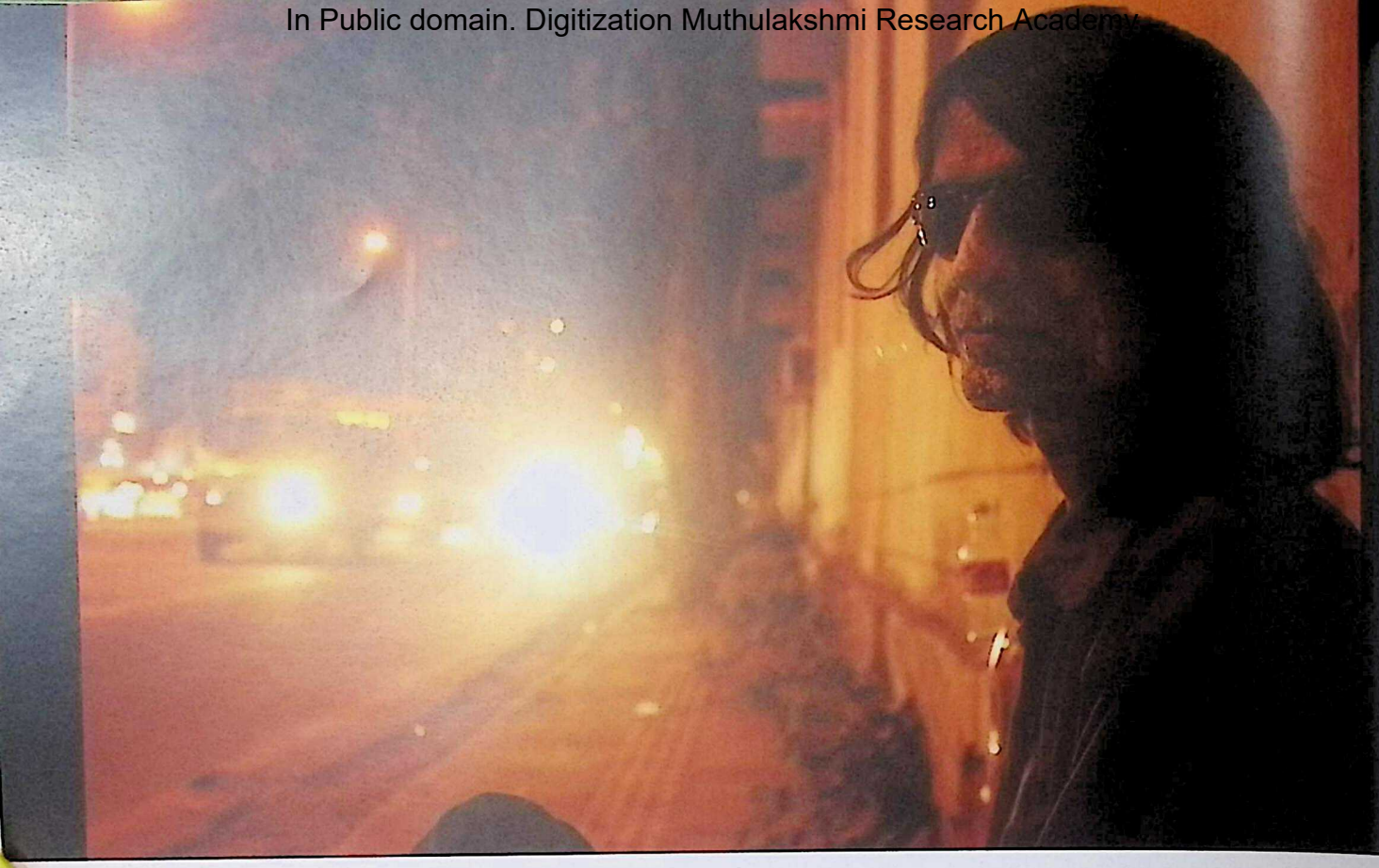

6
Still from *Nazara*, Gagan Singh, 2017.

To be a filmmaker? A sad answer, can't live with it.

It's painful and demoralizing to arrive at such an impasse.

Then one day a memory appears from years ago. Of sitting by a river, feeling very good; then, later, feeling terrible seeing the water hyacinth eat up the river. Of feeling a connection, a need to say something, to find out more. Research begins afresh, intensively. Reading, meeting people, spending more time around the site. Windows open that we didn't know existed. Now the value of research jumps out at us, it is utterly necessary. Research, and writing. With writing more understanding occurs, things flow, weaknesses start mutating into strengths. Sometimes the writing devastates—this is not the film I want to make! The rejection of one's own writing becomes a strong guide.

We don't know who is teaching and who is learning, really. The "teacher" barely breathes, hardly offers opinions, so as not to disturb the trajectory while the student reaches a new place. The "teacher" has been a catalyst in attempting to let some air in; the student now leads the teacher.

***

Maya Krishna Rao, theatre-maker, spoke to us about how the inward gesture can turn into an outward movement, reaching the horizon. The inner reflects in the outer and vice-versa. When she shows how the mudra works, something starts to make sense. A movement comes from within, points to the horizon, can encompass the world, and all sorts of images, sounds, interpretations of time and narratives emerge, coming from the person who is at the centre of the whole practice, integrating the perceived dichotomy of the personal and the political.

***

Some small glimpses from the journey:

1. There are camels depicted in mosaic tiles on the subway walls. Now, they become reminiscent of the sarai on the river nala that existed at the same place earlier in history.

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Nala was a word for a clear channel of water, not for a dirty polluted drain.

2. The understated, lived dignity of a woman in her 80s, staying by herself. Even her reading the newspaper, taking a rickshaw alone, cooking, start to connect with my own life, my own dignity.
3. Trying to belong in a new city. A small replica of the Taj Mahal sits on the window ledge of my rented one-room, bought on a visit there with my parents. The cheap memento allows me reflections on home, and negotiations in an unfamiliar space.
4. Inner desires, permeating life and sexuality. I have found secret caves in the heart of Delhi. Where women write letters expressing deep wishes and longings. So many letters, that they have to be swept into a dustbin at the end of the day. Read them, take some home. The heart of my film, and me.
5. A strange man, face painted white, sits by the roadside, selling cigarettes. My encounters with him take me headlong into explorations of masculinity, and our gaze at each other.
6. The Babri Masjid. It has all been said, yet I feel the need to go to Ayodhya, to be present and to look for a memorial. Searching, I find reasons close to home. It all begins to flow.

The conceptual, historical, emotional start to converge, and something else, floundering, tries to emerge.

Problem. To make what you see be seen, through the intermediary of a machine that does not see it as you see it.[7]

This negotiation occurs even in preliminary "exercises", sometimes. A mali, gardener, watering plants is filmed in a way that transcends the immediacy of the sociological, even while acknowledging it completely. The plants, the water, and him. The way his hand moves when he plants saplings, and the way the camera follows, tell us more about his connection with his work, than an interview asking "How long have you been doing this work?"

Yet, at other times words turn out to be central.

It is with something clean and precise that you will force the attention of inattentive eyes and ears.[8]

FIGURE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All images in this essay are from films made by students of the Creative Documentary Course at Sri Aurobindo Centre for Arts and Communication, New Delhi.

NOTES

1 *Chronique d'un été/Chronicle of a Summer* (1961). A French documentary film by sociologist Edgar Morin and anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch.

2 Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (London: Pluto Press, 1977).

3 Ibid.

4 Rustom Bharucha, *Rajasthan: An Oral History—Conversations with Komal Kothari* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003). Chapter 1—"The Past in The Present", pp. 19–20.

5 Ibid., Chapter 4—"Oral Epics", pp. 116–17.

6 Kavita Singh, lecture at the Creative Documentary Course, Sri Aurobindo Centre for Arts and Communication, New Delhi.

7 Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*.

8 Ibid.

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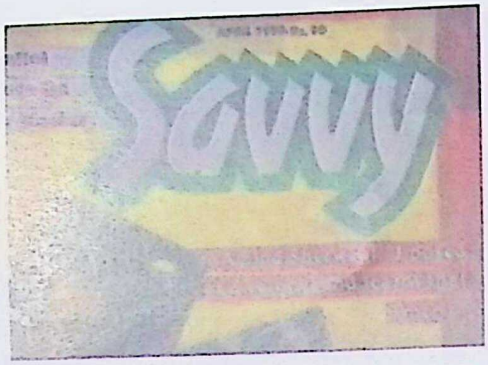
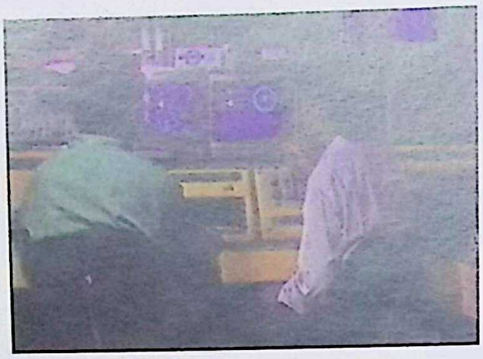
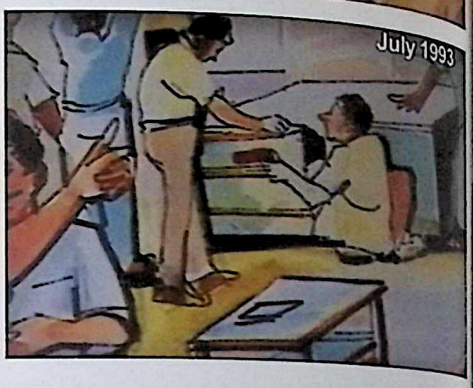
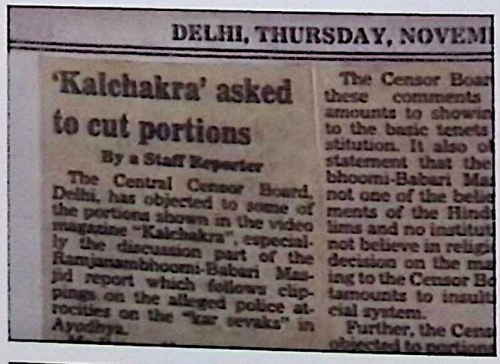


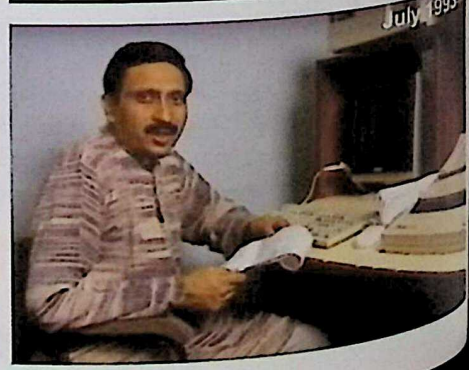




Video News Magazine as Documentary Evidence: The Case of *Kalchakra*

ISHITA TIWARY





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THE VIDEO MAGAZINE CONCEPT WAS INTRODUCED IN INDIA IN 1987 AS AN entertainment form. There are conflicting reports of the sequence and type of video magazines, but for this article I focus on the current affairs video news magazine. In "Video Magazines: The Medium is the Message", the periodical *Playback and FastForward* (P&FF) observed: "In the video field the Indian Market has shown far more dynamism than the rest of the world.... In software, too no other country has exploited the magazine concept as in India.... It would not be too surprising if the effort of India Today is a frontrunner worldwide in using the video medium as a journalistic tool.... The effect of the video medium will be felt thereafter by DD, promising some improvement in TV."[1]

The video news magazine was unique to India and it redefined "news", traditionally controlled by the state, covering controversial events that Doordarshan (DD), the state broadcaster, did not cover. As Arvind Rajagopal's (2001) work on television shows, media reshapes the context in which politics is conceived, framed and enacted. In the absence of independent journalist access to state-controlled broadcasting, the video news magazine signalled an important intervention, technologically, aesthetically and in terms of circulation. In this article, I track the journey of India's first Hindi video news magazine, *Kalchakra* (Wheel of Time). *Kalchakra* was a pioneer in investigative stories and, it can be argued, a precursor to the sting operation model that in popular memory is associated with *Tehelka*'s "Operation Westend".

Eyal Weizman's (2010) work on forensic architecture demonstrates how, over time, the figure of witness began to be replaced in law by the concept of evidence. Human witnesses, plagued by trauma and forgetfulness, were considered to be capable of lying and deceiving courts in a way that non-human things could not. Thus, if an expert could correctly interpret the testimony of objects, then objects could convey the truth of an incident without bias and with greater accuracy than unreliable human witnesses. In *Mengele's Skull* (2012) Eyal Weizman and Thomas Keenan argue that forensic science is flawed and needs to be complemented by a "forensic aesthetic" which is capable of attending to the fragility of visual and other kinds of evidence. They suggest that "forensic aesthetics" is an arduous labour of truth construction, one where evidence is presented via all sorts of scientific, rhetorical, theatrical and visual mechanisms to persuade a public, or forum, of the truth. *Kalchakra* demonstrates this forensic imagination through the video camera.

(LEFT TO RIGHT)

1
Media coverage of the "Call Girl" tape in *Savvy* magazine, April 1990.

2
A *Statesman* article announcing the release of the first *Kalchakra* cassette.

3, 6, 11
Artistic rendering of the CBI raid in the Hawala tape.

4
Editing *Kalchakra*.

5, 9
Covers of the *Kalchakra* cassettes.

7, 12
Vineet Narain, anchor and editor-in-chief, introducing the Hawala story.

8, 10
Newspaper articles about censoring *Kalchakra*.

Kalchakra and the Forensic Imagination

Unlike *India Today*'s pioneering news video magazine, *Newstrack*, *Kalchakra* was founded on smaller capital, akin to a cottage industry, and had a different relationship to government in its moment of origin. Its founder Vineet Narain had started his career with the DD

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show "Yuva Manch" (Youth Forum) anchored by Vinod Dua. He later went on to create the DD show "Sach ki Parchai" (Shadow of Truth) which explored how government policies were implemented at the grassroots.[2] Narain claims that it is here that the use of hidden camera was first tried, a point I will focus on. In 1987, after a story on corruption in urban development societies attracted bureaucratic criticism, Narain left to found his own video news magazine.

He describes *Kalchakra* as "Sach ki Parchai in a video format". The venture had limited resources, and Shakti Studio in Delhi lent its space and free use of all its facilities as well as second-hand U-matic tapes. Narain roped in journalist and activist friends and after the success of the first issue, the team gradually expanded to around 43 people comprising reporters, researchers, sound recordists, lighting and camera crew. The cassettes were low-cost and the one-hour tape had six or seven stories, all investigative in nature. *Kalchakra* had a tie-up with an agency that would buy their cassettes and distribute the magazine to video libraries across the country. Topics included adulteration in Maggi noodles, female foeticide, communalism as well as more sensational material such as a "Call Girl" story in which a spot in Delhi was identified where men harassed and picked up women. There was also the story about politician Ajit Singh, in which his wife accused him of mental and physical abuse.[3] In this tape, the camera is hidden behind the curtains of the living room, capturing the testimony of the wife who comes out with a litany of allegations against Ajit Singh. The Ajit Singh tape caused ripples, as for the first time a camera had invaded the private life of a public figure, raising ethical issues around privacy.

The deployment of hidden video as evidence and as vehicle of truth-telling is dramatized in the last issue of the video news magazine. Called "Harshad se bada ghotala—CBI ne daba dala" (CBI supresses a bigger scam than Harshad), it was the magazine's most high-impact story.[4] The report, also called the Jain Hawala tape, exposes the nexus between 40 top politicians, bureaucrats and hawala (transfer) dealers involving illicit monetary transfers, and the role of the CBI in hiding the "biggest ever political scandal".[5] The tape begins with a highlight reel of the magazine's most famous exposés. It uses rapid cuts, analog special effects,[6] techno soundtrack and a voice-over glossing the main exposés. It segues into images of print media covering the stories broken by *Kalchakra*. Finally the logo of the magazine appears. Cut. The anchor, Vineet Narain, standing in a garden, introduces the story. Cut. Shift to a living room, where Narain, another journalist and well-known lawyer Ram Jethmalani pore over papers and Jethmalani explains the transaction for the video's audience. Cut. Narain sits in his office against the background of the magazine logo. He puts a phone on speaker and calls a CBI official. Cut. The camera pans across a farmhouse in Delhi, apparently the residence of one of the officials named in the hawala scam. This sequence is interspersed with a voice-over, drawings and official documentation to prove the official's complicity. The scene seems to use a two-camera setup, one capturing the immediate vicinity, journalists in conversation with guards; the other placed at a distance to capture this altercation from afar.

Narain and his managing editor Rajneesh Kapoor argue that the two-camera setup helped them demonstrate transparency.[7] For instance, if there was a charge that the closer view was fabricated, the second hidden camera placed at a distance would corroborate the event. Kapoor explained that as video cameras were bulky one had to plan in advance how to hide them, and the team did a recce before the shoot. Cameras would be hidden in trees, behind curtains, in a taxi with black paper on its windows and a hole cut out for the camera lens. Moreover, in those days people had no idea they might be filmed by a hidden camera.

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The discussion about the hidden camera suggests mobilization of a particular aesthetic form to produce the impression of transparency. The camera here is also a technology for the production of evidence, as in the continuous relay and explanation of documents to persuade the viewer of an evidentiary ethic.

The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) ruled that the story defamed a large number of public figures and ordered its deletion. The FCAT (Film Certificate Appellate Tribunal) set aside and passed strictures against the Censor Board's ruling, the tribunal bench asserting that the story was a result of investigative journalism: "what may seemingly be uncomfortable is not merely swept away under the carpet by the expediency of censorship under the guise of 'defamation' or by a 'holier than thou' posture."[8] Narain pursued the matter by filing a PIL (Public Interest Litigation) in the Supreme Court. The judgement in the case *Vineet Narain & Others vs Union of India & Another* on December 18, 1997, questioned the ability of government agencies like the CBI to investigate cases like the Jain Hawala case. As a result of this PIL, the Supreme Court recommended various mechanisms to ensure the efficient working of the CBI.[9]

Now faded from popular memory, *Kalchakra* constitutes an important archival point in the history of media in India. There are efforts underway to digitize the tapes and to put them up on YouTube. As a vernacular news magazine, it was a pioneer in investigative journalism, and a forerunner of the forensic media imaginary using sting operations as made famous by *Tehelka*, *India TV*, *Aaj Tak* and others. This article captures a small fragment of this important moment in the history of the forensic media imaginary in India.

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NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, WEBSITES

Hindustan Times

India Kanoon

Playback and FastForward

Savvy

Times of India

TV and Video World

INTERVIEWS

Vineet Narain, January 29, 2018

Rajneesh Kapoor, January 29, 2018

NOTES

1 *Playback and FastForward*, Vol. 2, Issue 8 (January 1, 1987): 45–47.

2 Information in this and the next paragraph is from an interview with Vineet Narain, January 29, 2018.

3 Ibid. and *Times of India*, February 19, 1991.

4 The Harshad Mehta multi-crore stock market and banking scam had been exposed by journalist Sucheta Dalal in 1992.

5 *Times of India*, November 25, 1993. Hawala is an informal transfer system based not on movement of cash, but instead on the performance and honour of a huge network of money brokers.

6 For lack of a better term I am using the term "analog special effects". By this I am referring to effects such as swipes, split screens etc.

7 Information in this paragraph is from interviews with Vineet Narain and Rajneesh Kapoor, January 29, 2018.

8 *Times of India*, November 25, 1993.

9 https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1203995/. Accessed on January 25, 2018.

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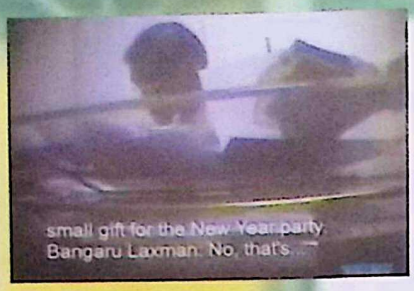

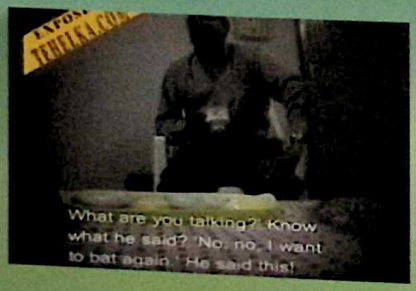

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Sting Videos: Everydayness as Truth-Aesthetic

SHAUNAK SEN

On March 13, 2001, then Congress spokesperson Jaipal Reddy memorably quipped that the equivalent of a nuclear explosion had just hit Indian politics.[1] The national media was in a tizzy. Posing as arms dealers, journalists from *Tehelka* had hawked absurdly bogus army products to the Indian government. A staggering 34 officials, including the ruling party president Bangaru Laxman, were allegedly caught on tape demanding favours to endorse the cheekily named Lepak Handheld Thermal Camera, a fictitious product concocted by the journalists.[2] As the news broke, officials were suspended, ministers resigned and the ruling coalition lost support from one of its member parties.[3] The government appeared on the brink of a historic collapse.

The collapse however never materialized. Instead, *Operation Westend* (2001) left in its wake long judicial skirmishes, some delayed verdicts, a severe backlash that nearly ran *Tehelka* aground, and an enduring cultural-legal legacy. The grainy image of Bangaru Laxman became a hyper-iconic signifier of corruption, cited widely in public discourse. For the next decade, the hazy low-angle images, splotched sound and washed-out alabaster-grey palettes of the sting video installed a formidable aesthetic template, inaugurating a visual grammar of what "truth" looked like.

1
Screenshot from *Operation Westend*, *Tehelka*, 2001.

2
Aniruddha Bahal on *Aaj Tak* discussing *Operation Duryodhan* by *Cobrapost* and *India Today*, 2005.

3
Aniruddha Bahal in *Fallen Heroes*, *Tehelka*, 2000.

4
Aaj Tak's coverage of *Operation Duryodhan*, 2005.

5
Screenshot from *Fallen Heroes*, *Tehelka*, 2000.

6
Screenshot from *The Truth: Gujarat 2002*, *Tehelka*, 2007.

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The Everyday of Corruption

The political long-format investigation used by journalists such as Ashish Khetan, Aniruddha Bahal and Mathew Samuel, typically lasted several months.[4] Usually immersive, and precarious, such operations saw stingers fostering intimacies with targets over long periods of time. The slow unfurling relationship meant that the proceedings acquired a quotidian informality. Information would be divulged during meandering chats over afternoon tea, confessions amidst light-hearted banter, and private admissions over drinking sessions. Mannerisms were unstudied and informal, the speech fragmentary and staccato—this "naturalness" undergirded the form's "reality-effect".

Bribe practices accrete over time into whole cultures, with their internal logics of civility and comity.[5] This is a coy world of euphemistic transactions—in *Operation Duryodhan* (2005, *Cobrapost* and *India Today*) for instance, Aniruddha Bahal and Suhasini Raj posed as obsequious traders from Moradabad urging MPs to raise specific questions in Parliament. Bahal spoke of wanting to build a "sambandh" ("relationship"), instate a "system", while Suhasini Raj gave a "bhent" ("offering").[6] Bribes were "paid consultancy" or "good planning fees". The object of illegality, i.e. the practice of bribery, was displaced into imaginary structures of kinship or friendship, and the promise of long-term relationships. The many months of friendly familiarity, private jokes and dinner invitations meant that the spy-cam amassed vast volumes of informal everyday chatter.

The sting's exclusive rhetorical claim rested on the concealed status of the spy-cam. This allowed the journalist to claim a special purchase in accessing "truth", contending that targets behaved as they would normally, *irrespective* of the camera's presence. The form of the sting thus putatively sidestepped long-standing critiques of conventional non-fiction, which held that the camera's presence influenced that which it recorded. The sheer length and informal ambience of the political sting strongly showcased this ability—to capture everyday "life" without any obtrusive influence.

This general air of unaffected behaviour also revealed how the phenomenon of corruption was everyday and routine. Shiv Visvanathan, Akhil Gupta and William Mazzarella contend that corruption practices are, for a large demographic, tactics which make legible, enable access to or forge "contact" with a state that is opaque, exclusionary and illegible.[7] In other words, they suggest that corruption is sutured into the fabric of people's everyday lives.

This banality often takes the shape of a "public secret", or a "known unknown".[8] Public secrets have an unmediated luminosity: despite being routinized, systemic and often in plain sight, they are in principle anterior to the world of formal images. It has been argued that *Tehelka*'s scoop was significant because it ascribed for the first time an indexical image to an idea—corruption—that was commonly known but officially unseen.[9] A concrete, materially verifiable "freeze frame of India's infamously corrupt gene" was suddenly available in the public domain.[10]

I argue that early stings were especially significant for the way they transformed the everyday into an aesthetic programme. In aestheticizing the everyday, the sting created what we can call the "agonistic everyday": the visual sensorium of the everyday as framed by the sting.

The Everyday as Agonistic

The early stings looked crude and unprocessed. With the low-resolution muffled audio, running time-codes, guide-frames, glitches and black-bands, the suggestion was that it was

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still the pure unsullied mechanical image the spy-cam first saw. The rawness insinuated that the images were produced in covert high-risk conditions. The precarity of production was enunciated as distress marks on the video's body.

The degraded visuals invited the viewer to dig, disinter and make sense of them—offering privileged sensory access to a secret beyond ordinary appearances. Behaviourally however, the world resembled everyday life. Actions were prosaic yet secretive, the passage of time quotidian yet exceptional, and demeanours credibly natural yet deceitful. This presented an agonistic world made of riven, bipolar and implacable elements. In capturing these operations in all their pedestrian quality the sting transformed them, underscoring the agonistic character of an everyday that vacillated between poles of the ordinary and the iconic-spectacular.

This split was palpable on the temporal register. At one level, there was the flow of time during the sting operation that resembled unrecorded everyday time (a time-stamp that Bill Nichols has described as "dead" or "empty" time).[11] The temporal mode has a humdrum, workaday "natural" flow only because the targets were unaware that they were being recorded. Yet, this time during the sting was simultaneously co-present with the stinger's anticipation of its movement through subsequent contexts afterwards. While performatively reinforcing one temporal frame, the stinger simultaneously inhabited future grids of intelligibility—of the sting documentary shown during the press conference, the TV news package, and the eventual judicial process. He (usually, he) anticipated and calibrated his behaviour during the sting to cater to those possible frames in the future. Various sting videos had signature moments that betrayed this: the stinger repeated, summarized, prodded and jostled to get logistical details, constantly speaking to the expected future lives of the recorded material.

The "agonistic everyday" was thus an undulating, two-faced world that aesthetically sublimated the idea of furtiveness, while appearing familiarly anti-climactic and mundane at the same time. If the quotidian inner life of the public secret had to have an image, the sting provided it. Behaviourally pedestrian and aesthetically scandalous, the videos were charged equally with the humdrum as they were by the potential of iconicity. In the middle of a bewildering account of match-fixing in *Tehelka's Fallen Heroes* (2000), a cricket-selector's wife walks into the room with a tray of tea and biscuits. The tense conversation is briefly interrupted by moments of awkward pleasantry. *Tehelka's* sting retained the whole duration of this gauche interruption in its narrative without editing it out. Various such moments of random everydayness appear in other stings. The political sting thus established a dense mis-en-scene of everydayness, as the narrative context in which the acts of actual corruption took place. This ordinary workaday was a central part of the "world-making", the "umwelt" of corruption that the sting claimed to expose.

The Sting Loop

Typically 2–3 hours long, these sting videos would at first be shown in press conferences, and then distributed via CDs to the press. As an exposé would gain traction, news channels would usually run "loops" of the stings. The most incendiary footage would be looped as small packages (30–90 seconds). These loops used bright red circles to highlight particular gestures (hands extended to accept bribes, nods, smiles etc.) or montages of dialogues that affix guilt ("will you get the cash"). An artillery of rousing music, font, graphics, voice-overs and anthemic delivery drummed up melodramatic reportage. These would replay ad infinitum through the news story. The displacement of the public secret into national

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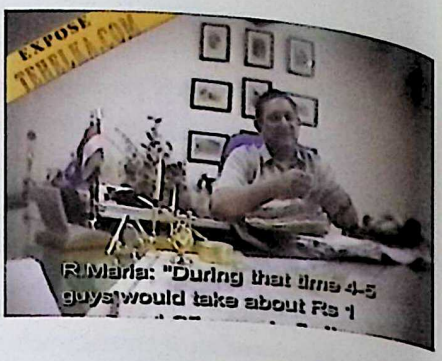

7–12
Screenshots from *Fallen Heroes*, the first sting on match-fixing, *Tehelka*, 2000.

television conferred a heavy moral charge to mundane acts. Gestures like handshakes, hugs or even smiles were heavily re-semanticized. A handshake would be "selling the nation", while a hug was a "deal with the devil".

The agonistic everyday thus became a site of desecration. When confronted with public defacement, institutions that aren't routinely sacred become the site of what Michael Taussig terms the "negative-sacred".[12] Defacement often re-charges the sacral status of objects it desecrates. Institutions of the bureaucracy, cinema or politics faced an "icono-crisis" as they became subjects of the sting loop. The moment of defacement looping ad nauseam on television managed to create a "taint", provoking brisk corrective reactions like urgent denials, resignations, suspensions and lawsuits.

Obscenely Transparent Everydays

Ida Koivisto suggests that "transparency" is built on a metaphor of a see-through physical object.[13] It surmises three things—a viewing subject, a tangible object that's see-through (like a window), and a target that's visible only because of the diaphanous object in the middle. Transparency positions itself as an invisible condition through which content is revealed—a see-through window that impartially shows the target object without influencing it. But in its real usage, Koivisto observes that it's a heavily iconophilic operation. The transparency ideal in governance would have us believe that it denudes governance of all opacity. Yet this transparency is achieved not by showing the actual day-to-day processes of governance, but via mimetic devices or visual constructs like "illustrations, images, statistics, performances, and reports etc.—conscious, constructed appearances". It is in this regard that the sting was the instrument of transparency par-excellence: it showed not a visual construct, but a concrete object via a powerfully referential image. In the making of corruption into a visible object, the transparency-imaginary was provided with its very elan-vital.

Watching this was often akin to watching something pornotopic. It was the plenitude in affect, in watching the lascivious private-self of politicians, the avarice of bureaucrats, the abuse-ridden gossip of cricketers. The general effect was, as Mazzarella notes, that people had somehow been soiled.

What had been soiled was not an individual or a group of people, but a familiar mode of daily life itself. It was this "melodrama of the everyday", that the early Indian sting triggered.[14]

NOTES

1 "In the history of this country, we have never had such explosive evidence of corruption. It is equivalent to Pokhran." Jaipal Reddy on March 13, 2001. Quoted in Madhu Trehan, *Prism Me A Lie, Tell Me A Truth: Tehelka As Metaphor*

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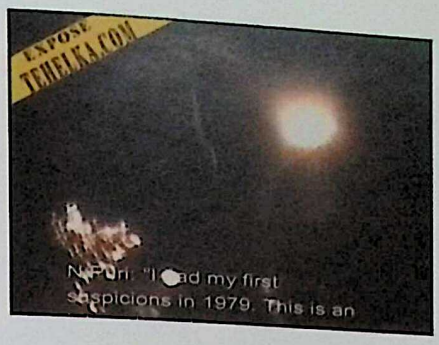

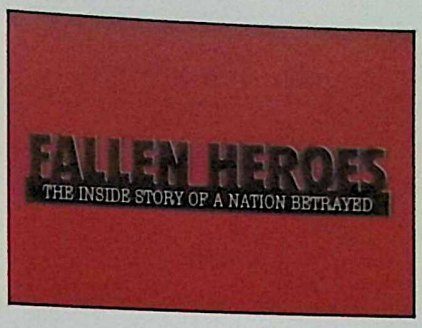

(New Delhi: Roli Books, 2009). See http://www.thehoot.org/research/books/the-breaking-story-4964.

2 Lepak was the name of the anti-aircraft supergun wielded by the character Yossarian in Joseph Heller's popular novel *Catch-22* (1953).

3 Mamata Banerjee pulled support from the coalition, while Jaya Jaitley and George Fernandes handed in their resignations. Trehan, *Prism Me A Lie*.

4 The sting saw different subsequent iterations like the "casting couch" sting etc. This essay does not discuss those subsequent sub-genres.

5 See Shiv Visvanathan, "The Necessity of Corruption", *Seminar* (date not specified), http://www.india-seminar.com/2008/590/590_shiv_visvanathan.htm. Also see: William Mazzarella, "Internet X-Ray: E-Governance, Transparency, and Politics of Immediation in India", *Public Culture*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2006): 473–505; Akhil Gupta, "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse on Corruption, the Culture of Politics and the Imagined State", in Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (eds.), *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2006).

6 These are all terms used by people in *Operation Duryodhan*.

7 Though their arguments often differ widely, the three have broadly described corruption as an everyday phenomenon.

8 The bribe falls into different ideas of secrecy—the "public secret" of Michael Taussig ("Secrecy Magnifies Reality" from *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labour of the Negative* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999]), or the nuanced category of the "known unknowns" of Clare Birchall ("Aesthetics of the Secret", 2015. Published in Onlineopen.org. See http://onlineopen.org/aesthetics-of-the-secret). Also see Ravi Sundaram, "Publicity, Transparency and the Circulation Engine—The Media Sting in India", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 56, Supplement 12 (2005).

9 William Mazzarella makes the observation that the stings showed corruption for the first time.

10 This was a quote by Shoma Chaudhury, former editor of *Tehelka* in 2012, after Bangaru Laxman's conviction by a trial court. See Shoma Chaudhury, "The Real Scandal of Operation Westend Was Not the Findings on Tape but the Reaction of the Rulers", Tehelka.com, 2012, available at http://www.tehelka.com/2012/05/the-real-scandal-of-operation-west-end-was-not-the-findings-on-tape-but-the-reaction-of-the-rulers/. Accessed on December 2, 2017.

11 Nichols has distinguished between "story time" and "dead time" in his observations about documentaries that deploy a deeply "observational mode". For him "story time is the time propelled by the cause/effect logic of classical narrative where an economy of carefully justified and well-motivated actions prevails. 'Dead' or 'empty' time unfolds where nothing of narrative significance occurs but where the rhythms of everyday life settle in and establish themselves." Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 40.

12 Michael Taussig expands on this concept in his book *Defacement*.

13 This section is based on Ida Koivisto's excellent essay "The Anatomy of Transparency: The Concept and Its Multifarious Implications" (2016), http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/41166.

14 I would like to thank Ranjani Mazumdar, Ravi Vasudevan, Ravi Sundaram, Nandita Badami, Aman Mann and Nidhi Mishra for their comments on different iterations of this piece.

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Experimenta India: Curating and Exhibiting Experimental Film, Video and Moving Image in India

ANUJA JAIN

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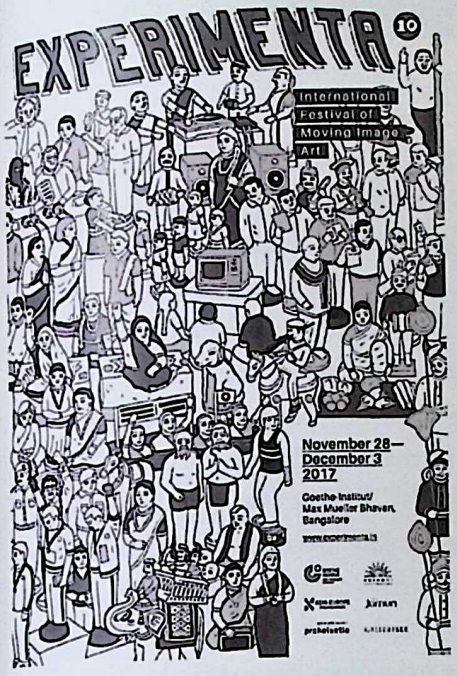

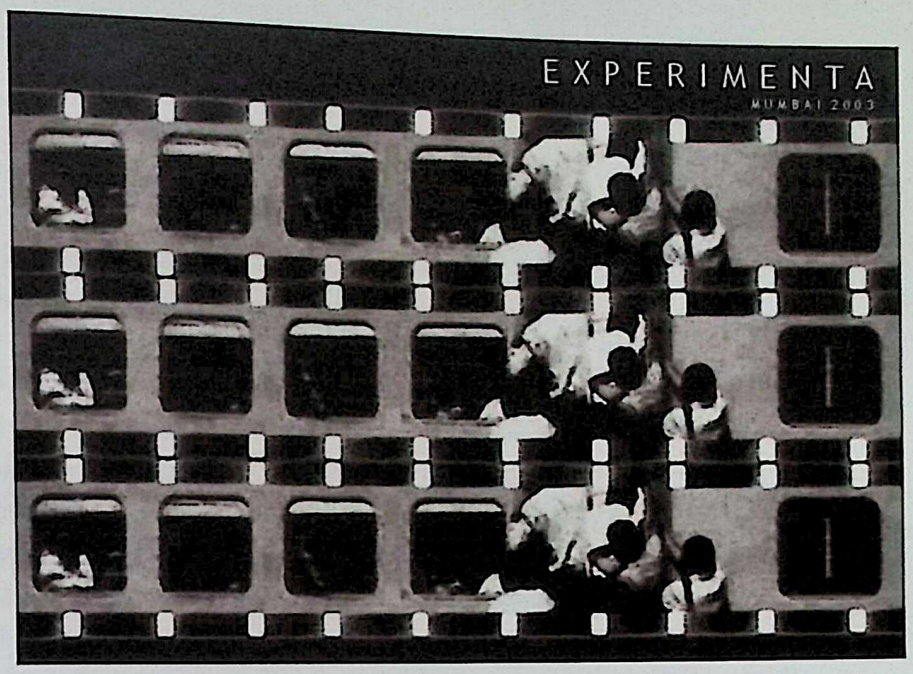

1-3
Posters for the Experimenta film festival, Mumbai. Courtesy Shai Heredia.

4
Image from the original *Samskara* brochure, designed by S.G. Vasudev, 1970. Courtesy experimenta.in.

In 2003, OVER THREE EVENINGS AT THE BRITISH COUNCIL AUDITORIUM IN BOMBAY, A PACKED hall of about 300 people experienced a day in the life of an insect materially imprinted in celluloid. Filmmaker Stan Brakhage reanimated dead moths by painstakingly affixing the remains of these insects, with leaves and flower petals, onto a 16mm film strip, and fed it through the projector, creating the illusion of life through light. Brakhage evoked the "fragile sensation of its movement, batting against the screen, hurtling in descent".[1] The effect was exhilarating and terrifying. The film was one of 15 non-narrative, abstract 16mm films, including *Wavelength* by Michael Snow, *Unsere Afrikareise* by Peter Kubelka and *Berlin Horse* by Malcolm Le Grice, curated by Indian experimental filmmaker Shai Heredia for Experimenta 2003, the first festival dedicated to the practice of experimental cinema and video art in India (figure 1). Since then, Experimenta India has been nurturing an alternative community that recuperates and assembles international and Indian artists' films and videos, both historical and contemporary. In this article, I analyse this curatorial history for its engagement with the dynamics of experimentation with the moving image and video art in India; as an index of the challenges of retrieving and remembering of marginalized, elusive or dismissed artistic practices; and the politics, both material and aesthetic, of the curatorial decisions that inform such historiographic work.

The 2013 edition of Experimenta kicked off on November 27 with a rare screening of Pattabhi Rama Reddy's celebrated 1970 film *Samskara* (Funeral Rites), based on U.R. Ananthamurthy's 1965 novel, a bold and blistering look at the caste system (figure 2). The print on view was discovered by Heredia at the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin whose collections included a lot of regional Indian cinema. The screening foregrounded questions of living archives, and of access that often defines such curatorial work.[2] Significantly, the National Film Archive of India also has a print of *Samskara* that cannot be taken out of the archive.

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5
Fragment of a salvaged home-video re-animated: *Enroute or Of a Thousand Moons*, Ayisha Abraham, 2011.

6
Still from *Noon Day Dispensary*, Priya Sen, 2014.

7
Exploring the periphery of sanity: *There is Something in the Air*, Iram Ghufran, 2011.

8
Modernist aesthetics: *Mount Song*, Shambhavi Kaul, 2013.

Walter Benjamin reminds us that "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[3] It is then significant that Heredia chose to screen *Samskara*, a Kannada-language film in 2013, when Indian state and cinema came together to celebrate the Indian cinema centenary. The memorialization was marked by a competing set of affective, material and ideological investments in the national, with a particular privileging of Hindi-language Bombay cinema. Experimenta used the occasion of the film centenary to recover alternative film histories and avenues of distribution and exhibition.

In the words of its curators, the festival envisions an "idiosyncratic movement of cinema concerned with decontextualizing 'experimental film' by exploring fresh cultural relationships between genre and form, light and motion, physics and grace."[4] The conscious focus of the festival has been to specially reshape the concerns of the traditional avant-garde to include feminine perspectives and desires that have often been occluded from the histories of Indian cinema. Each edition of Experimenta is marked by an extremely diverse body of works ranging from archival recuperation to new contemporary works. Archival screenings include Kamal Swaroop's *Om-Dar-Ba-Dar* (1988), Nina Shivdasani's *Chhatrabhang* (1976), Amitabh Chakraborty's *Kaal Abhirati* (1989), Sanjiv Shah's *Hun Hunshi Hunshilal* (1992), early D.G. Phalke films like *Lanka Dahan* (1917), and the experimental documentaries produced by the Films Division during the 1960s and '70s.

Amongst new works, Shambhavi Kaul's visually stunning *Mount Song* (2013) uses reconstituted imagery from Hong Kong cinema of the 1970s and '80s, to create an ominous setting in which doors, cages, lanterns and other familiar genre artefacts seem to take on a life of their own (figure 8). Responding to the loss of an imagined ideal place by mobilizing "futuristic digital artefacts", Kaul interrogates how the travel of cultural artefacts across borders results in an unexpected melding. Ayisha Abraham's *Enroute or Of a Thousand Moons* (2011) is a collage of various found and salvaged home-videos from discarded family archives (figure 5). The decontextualized, grainy videos offer little in terms of actual documentation of time, place or history but are connected to a number of forms that come together to create a synchronous rhythm. In its texture and materiality, the 3-inch spool of 8mm film resembles an inanimate object, shelved and ignored. With the passage of light through a glass lens, images once hidden away in the obsolescence of their form are brought to life, conjured up in the manner of what Abraham calls "phantoms of the past". Kush Badhwar's *Blood Earth* (2013) explores the relationship between music, struggle and cultural responses to violence through word and sound. It offers a portrait of conflict in modern-day India, focusing on a bauxite-rich region in Odisha where the tribals have been resisting the incursions of the mining industry. It interweaves song, farming, village life and a political meeting to improvise a junction between voice, music, silence, sound and noise. Shot on celluloid and produced by the Film and Television Institute of India, Prantik Basu's surreal and poetic diploma film *Sakhisona* (2017) uses black-and-white aesthetics to explore the myths hidden in the archaeological layers of the earth. The film narrates the story of Sakhisona who elopes with her lover in search of a home and ends up in an

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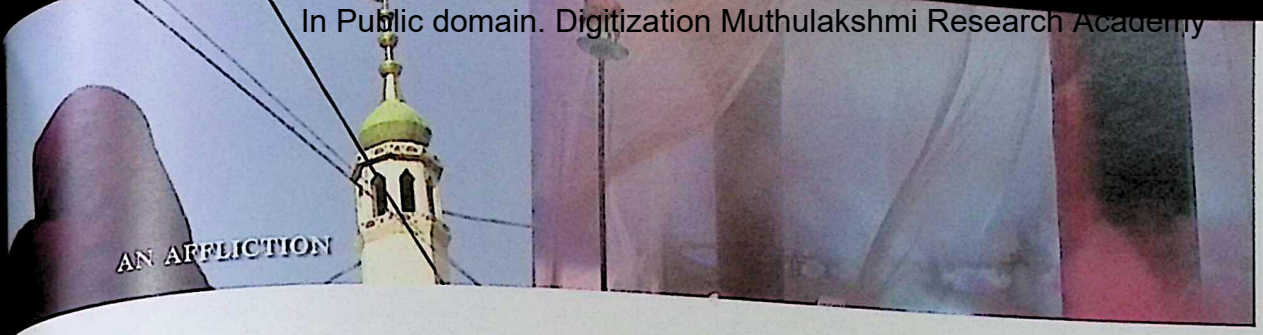

abandoned village by the woods. Constantly switching between the modes of folklore and history, the film re-enacts stories from the recently uncovered remains of a monastery and 6th-century objects in an experimental narrative pattern.

The festival also showcased Priya Sen's *Noon Day Dispensary*, part of a video series from the Savda-Ghevra Resettlement Colony in Delhi (2014). This vérité-style documentary disrupts easy narratives around eviction, resettlement and city planning. In its style, the video contests the hold of developmental documentaries and rights-based agendas over forms of explanation and narration. Through the "performance" of the filmmaker and her frame, the work describes the range of negotiations and subjectivities that accompany the process of uprootment and resettlement of the city's illegal occupants (figure 6). Iram Ghufran's *There is Something in the Air* (2011) blends documentary and fictional tropes to weave a narrative that is based on "hearsay". With no experts, no eyewitnesses and unreliable narrators, the film is a series of dream narratives. The film invites the viewer into a fantastical world as it brings together accounts of the women "petitioners" at the shrine of a Sufi saint who are "afflicted" by something in the air—be it a spirit, demon, ghost or djinn—and explores the possibilities that "insanity" produces (figure 7).

Though the films and practitioners don't always share aesthetic ideologies or positions, marked as they are by an immense variety of concerns and styles, they share certain larger approaches. These are: a non-acceptance of definitions and distinctions between genres of film—narrative, experimental, documentary and fiction; a rejection of the idea that cinema is only a mass medium, its production, distribution and exhibition dictated by the marketplace; and a bid to explore the interface between the languages of the visual and performing arts on the one hand and the cinematic medium on the other. Rather than asking "What is experimental film?" the festival creates a platform to inquire "What can the moving image do?" Thus, for Heredia, both as a filmmaker and as a curator, it has been important to move beyond a generic category, "experimental film", to generate reflexive categories such as "Optical Rhythm", "Digital Mutations", "Fact and Fantasy", "Sculpture of the Screen" and "Politics of Form". The curatorial organization of the festival programme across its various editions reflects the important role Experimenta has been playing in expanding the porous boundaries of film as art in India, and creating a space that critically reflects upon the continuously fluid and diverse engagements with the moving image.

NOTES

1 Darragh O'Donoghue, *"Mothlight"*, *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 32 (July 2004), http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/cteq/mothlight/. Accessed March 10, 2018.

2 Author's interview with Shai Heredia in February 2018.

3 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 255.

4 Shai Heredia, "Bombay Experiments", in Brad Butler and Karen Mirza (eds.), *Cinema of Prayoga: Indian Experimental Film & Video 1913–2006* (London: No.w.here, 2006), p. 46.

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The Work of Freedom in a World of Images

PALLAVI PAUL

THE PHOTO SERIES EXHIBITED BY ARTIST RAVI AGARWAL IN DOCUMENTA11 FIRST appeared in a book titled *Down and Out: Labouring under Global Capitalism* co-authored by sociologist Jan Breman and academic and journalist Arvind Das. The book, which is based on fieldwork done by Breman from the early 1960s in pockets of Gujarat, is a portrait of movement. The term "labour", Breman notes, has been used mostly to signify industrial work; however the "largest working class in world history was mainly or solely employed in agriculture".[1] The question of caste-based exclusion of certain communities from economic mobility, coupled with the near absence of radical land reforms, has laid the foundation for this state of ceaseless movement. Breman takes the case of the Dublas (which in English translates as "weak"), a scheduled tribe who were later rechristened by Gandhi as Halapati[2] or "the bearers of the plough". On account of lack of skill and basic education they were not eligible to work in the modern factories of Mumbai, and after the abolition of bonded labour big landowners no longer wanted them to work the land. Like the Dublas, a massive contingent of "unemployable" rural peasantry had no other option but to shift location in order to find work and a dwelling. This gave a seasonal form and rhythm to the workers' lives. It is this ceaseless, sometimes weary but mostly resilient, rhythm that Agarwal's images conjure up. These are photographs not just of workers but also of work. People in *Down and Out* and in Agarwal's images have things to do, even in the absence of a job description. The dynamism of the moment in which these pictures are taken offers a glimpse of the larger momentum into which these lives are precariously woven.

A building is being made, sacks of vegetables are being lifted and loaded onto a railway platform (figure 1). The next train must be around the corner, the handcart full of

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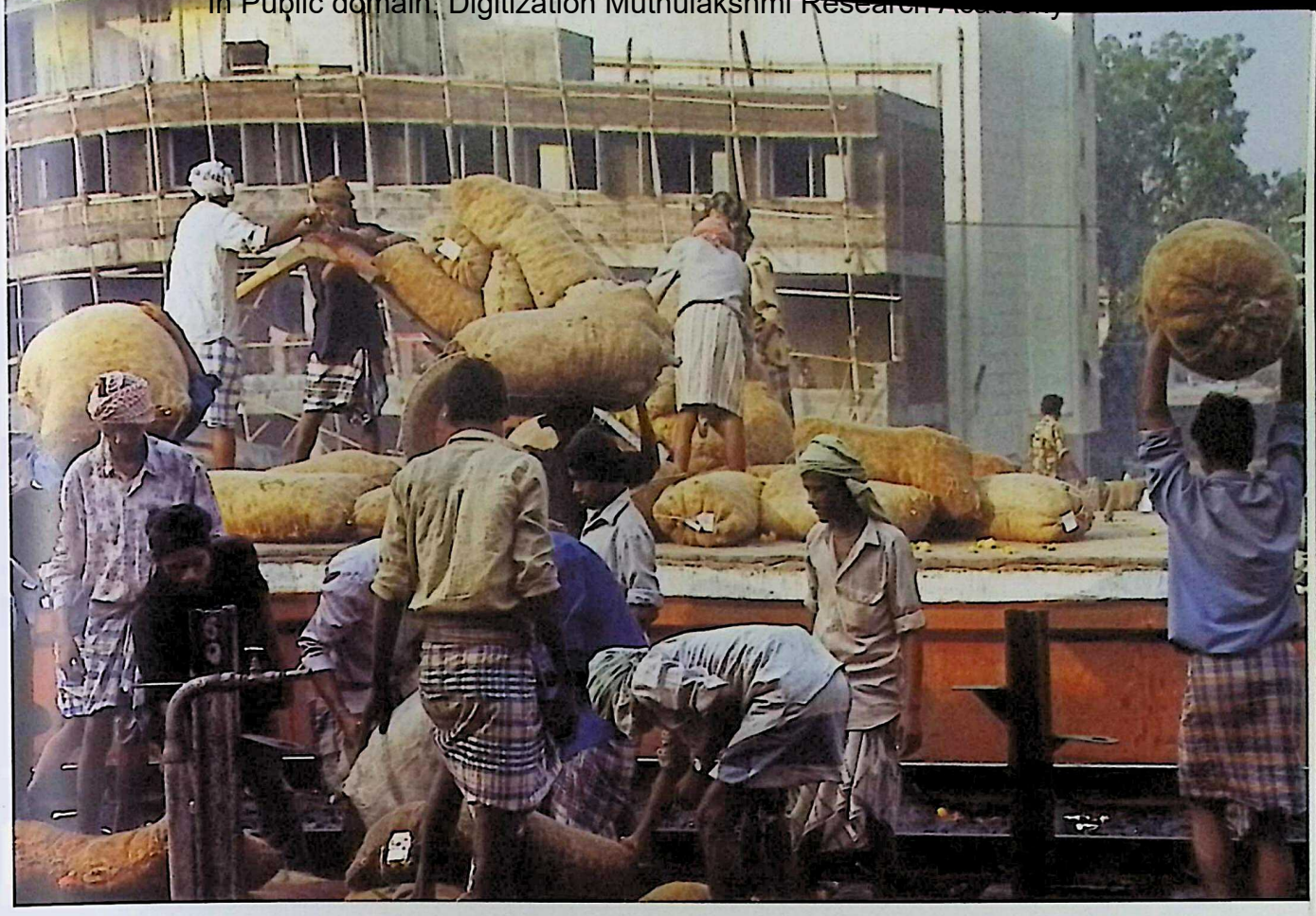

1
Photograph from *Down and Out: Labouring under Global Capitalism*, Ravi Agarwal, 2000.

perishables must reach the mandi before it is too late. Cloth, metal, water all begin to bear the imprint of the work day. Cityscapes gleam in the background, standing as provocation between two ways of life. They oscillate, from being sacred symbols of contemporary capital to providing the incidental landscape amidst which the drama of a working life at large unfolds. Martha Rosler, discussing the work of American photographers like Chauncey Hare and Fred Lonidier, notes: "Their chosen course is a difficult one. They do not mark their closure in discourse per se. It is a practice that resides in 'the world at large' and it resides in museums, galleries, lecture halls and symposia. They swim in the stream of art-world discourse to varying extents but are more interested in having an effect on the world that has nothing to do with it."[3]

Rosler locates these kinds of documentary photography practices within the domain of "a culture of opposition". While her commentary is about the portraits of Standard Oil workers made by Chauncey and those of the photo industry made by Lonidier, it seems to speak to Agarwal's practice. At once environmentalist, image-maker and writer, Agarwal brings an acute awareness of various conceptual roadmaps offered by images. Describing Project Y (Public. Art. Outreach), an art project held on the banks of the river Yamuna in 2011, he outlines a new empathetic-critical vision of landscape and the need to reproduce the river as an ecological public.

Building on Agarwal's suggestion of recovering "affective ways of knowing and relating with nature outside a forensic architecture of knowledge",[4] T.J Demos writes: "Creative ecology would suggest nothing less than a radically different mode of world-building, a cosmopolitics based within the values of equality and justice, rather than hierarchy and exploitation, individual wealth accumulation and competitiveness."[5] Demos argues that art

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2
Photograph from *Down and Out: Labouring under Global Capitalism*, Ravi Agarwal, 2000.

3
From the series *Metal Man*, Ravi Agarwal, 2008.

has the ability to create the connections that make the world open up as a network of values, relationships and forms of life.

Demos's key terms for a radical contemporary ecological discourse also seem like the weave with which some of Agarwal's works are interworked. A puzzling image appears in his documenta11 project. In the thick of night, bare-chested workers peer over machines under the harsh low-hanging tubelights of a factory; other workers wearing sweaters look directly into the camera (figure 2). It is difficult to get clear information from this picture. Even simple details elude us—what is being made, what time it is, even what the season is. Nothing is clear except the feeling of toil and the foreshortened horizon of body and mind. This artistic disarticulation is mirrored in Agarwal's later works like *Alien Waters* (2004–06) where a scarecrow, an abandoned setup of two plastic chairs on the banks of a filthy river, rituals of death imaged as ashes and flowers floating on water, defaced idols become unlikely narrators of the story of the battered Yamuna. *Metal Man* (2008) is a series of performative photographs, where an unclothed male body engages the metallic components of an industrial machine with a simultaneously combative and erotic charge (figure 3). Agarwal frames objects as they are held close to a body from which the face is excluded, captured in portrait-like midshot. The sweaty body is covered all over with the dust and grease from machine parts. The fingerprints of this worker are smeared all over these metallic surfaces. The contortions of his shoulders, arms and chest seem not discrete but a continuation of the ridges, joints and hollows of this machine. What is the collateral for this fusion? What are the terms of the contest? And what are the longings of this intimacy between the worker and his work? These frames hang like questions.

What makes Agarwal's aesthetic and critical manoeuvres pressingly contemporary is that his various forays into photography, environmental activism, installation and video appear so strongly integral to each other. In a reflective piece about his own practice he notes: "While photographing migrant labour in the interiors of South Gujarat, my time was spent with those who toiled at the grassroots of the economy, labouring ceaselessly, unheard, unseen. 'How have the lives of these citizens of modern India changed over the past half century?' I asked myself. My training as an engineer, obviously, had not provided me with an answer, or more importantly, confronted me with the question enough."[6] The separation

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of the technological from the social, human and ecological is a theme he repeatedly returns to. In visualizing how technological developments seem to have both surpassed and yet deeply transformed working-class lives Agarwal draws attention to the central problematic of our time.

Echoing some of these concerns and placing them in conversation with globalizing transformation, the artistic director of documenta11 Okwui Enwezor proposes: "From the moment the postcolonial enters into the space/time of global calculations and the effects they impose on modern subjectivity, we are confronted not only with the asymmetry and limitations of globalism's materialist assumptions but also with the terrible nearness of distant places that global logic sought to abolish and bring into one domain of deterritorialized rule."[7]

This "asymmetry" and "terrible nearness of distant places" which Enwezor identifies as markers of the postcolonial mediation of the time of global capital provide an interesting context to situate the work of Agarwal. Placed in the company of photographers such as David Goldblatt and his images of economic disparity in post-apartheid South Africa, Olumuyiwa Osifuye who captures different facets of Nigerian urbanity on the streets of Lagos, Alan Sekula who documents both life at sea and life of the sea, Bernd and Hilla Becher who photographed gargantuan, empty industrial buildings in Europe, Agarwal's work emerges as an interlocutor for not only the local-urban, but also for a global imaginary of justice that is consciously seeking to reconfigure the skewed distribution of power.

Agarwal's images deal with complex social locations with a sense of poetic urgency, unbound by ideological imperative. They revel in their imageness, in the fluid shadow of the unphotographable. It is perhaps useful to continue thinking about his artistic-political project not just through his visuals, but also the suggestion of that which needs to be imagined. In his work *Ambient Seas* Agarwal gives us a haunting thought: "On land I was certain, I could summon my social network and feel secure. I could call upon my legal and personal status and my ownership ledger and feel immortal. On land I could forget for a moment that I was just another being, a life, a life form. Here I have left my sociopolitical history and identity behind. The sea and my relationship to it has come down to the basics. I have slipped from being an individual into my 'species' identity."[8]

Agarwal's images of the global condition remind us of our inability to know fully and yet pose the challenging question of whether we can still be capable of radical empathy, whether our dislocation can ever be a roadmap towards a voyage and—most simply—whether we can still be free.

NOTES

1 Jan Breman, Arvind N. Das and Ravi Agarwal, *Down and Out: Labouring under Global Capitalism* (Amsterdam: University Press, 2000), pp. 4–6.

2 Jan Breman, *Labour Bondage in West India: From Past to Present* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

3 Martha Rosler, "Negotiating New (His) Stories of Photography", *Art Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (1994), doi:10.2307/777485.

4 Breman, Das and Agarwal, *Down and Out*, pp. 4–6.

5 T.J. Demos, "Creative Ecologies", *TAKE* (January 1, 2017).

6 Ravi Agarwal, "Resisting Technology; Regaining a Personal Ecology", *Sarai Reader* 03 (2003).

7 documenta11 catalogue (Stuttgart: HatjeCantz Verlag, 2002), pp. 42–55.

8 Ravi Agarwal, *Ambient Seas: Occasional Notes from October 12, 2013 to August 17, 2015* (New Delhi: Gallery Espace, 2015).

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Notebook of Geographies 2018

DESIRE MACHINE COLLECTIVE

Darkness
Sound of heartbeat, blood flow, breathing, ultrasound and other sounds of the body.

WOMAN (V.O.)
Here now there is a calm and a normalcy that bears the inaudible traces of the many loud frequencies that have recently passed in this endless circularity of an unbearable silence—the pause that punctuates the experience. The body is in shock and the many sounds of its functions are made manifest. Robert Stolorow a psychoanalyst and philosopher talks about how trauma is timeless and outside of time and how it breaks up the unifying thread of temporality.

MAN (V.O.)
The condition of sustained armed conflict makes disappearances and absences the new *normal*. Forgetting and erasure become devices to deal with trauma. Memory is like a recurring dream, never quite remembered but always familiar.

WOMAN (V.O.)
The window is an old device from the renaissance to create a separation between *us* and *them*; wo/man and nature; subject and object. The cinematic frame too is a window to observe, to look and see. Though sometimes seeing is just not enough. I want to feel, to touch and to linger.

Ma, in Japanese is an interval, a pause or space. The equivalent of the interval in music. This is probably what Milarepa talked about a thousand years ago in this verse:

1–8
Photographs and video stills shot in a derelict house in Srinagar, Kashmir from 2007 to 2011 during the research and production project *Nishan*, a multi-channel video installation with multiple channels of sound. The process involved a careful observation of the interiors of the house, its many absences and the traces of that which is repressed. Meanwhile outside, on the streets and canals, life goes on with apparent normalcy. The assembly of images alludes to a breaking down of the unifying thread of temporality, a dimension of trauma and the collapse of the conventions of linear perspective. Cinematographers: Nikhil Arolkar, Rahul Balachandran and Sonal Jain.

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The nature of the mind is Emptiness and Luminosity
Inseparably conjoined...
Spontaneously merging with the original state.
I am indifferent to the experience of good and bad.
With mind free and effortless, I rest in happiness and joy.

Where subject and object are realized as a single sphere
Happiness and sorrow as one...
Whatever circumstances I encounter,
I am free in the blissful realm of self-awakening Wisdom.

WOMAN (V.O.)
Paul Ricoeur noted in *Time and Narrative*. "We are not capable of producing a concept of time that is at once cosmological, biological, historical and individual. The activity of the narrative consists in constructing coherent temporal ensembles: in order to configure time...." And once trauma breaks this unifying thread of linear time, multiple temporalities converge into one space creating fissures that open up new realms where the mundane everyday transforms into the mythic and the fairytale.

WOMAN (V.O.)
This space is inhabited by the absences heavy and palpable and memories almost material in their presence. This is a haunting, of the past invading the present. However this haunting is also of the future, a future that is unknown but also unknowable and therefore has in it the element of horror.

Ruins exist of and for themselves even after humans are no longer around to experience their becoming, a becoming which is grandiose in its flailing. Ruins are a memory code, a location imbued with memories; a *mawbynna* or a memory-stone erected to remember. The Khasi word for memory is *kynmaw* or rooted in stone; songlines of the Australian aboriginals serve as maps to remember routes across thousands of kilometres; memory is a site of political contestation whose disintegrating state traces pain and trauma; it is a materiality: an excess, a force, a vitality and a relationality.

Darkness
Sound of heartbeat, blood flow, breathing, ultrasound and other body sounds.

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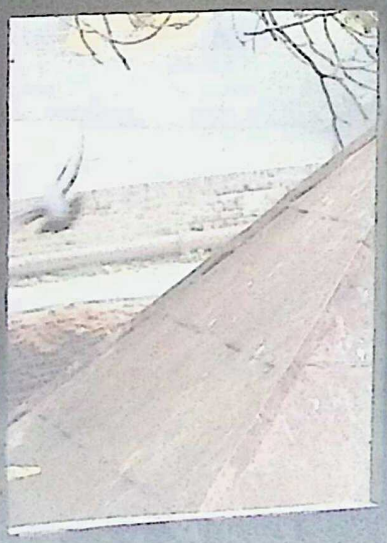

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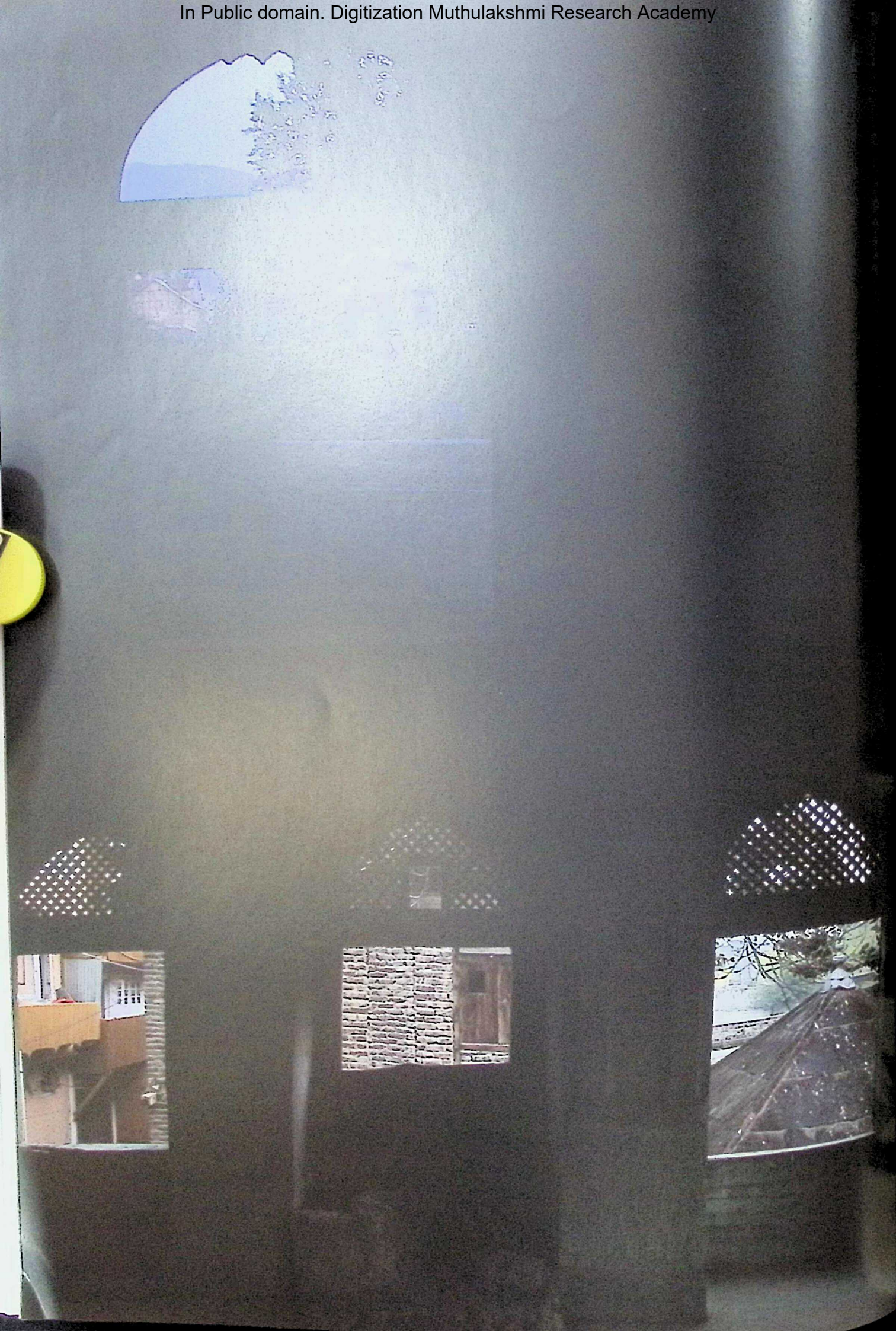

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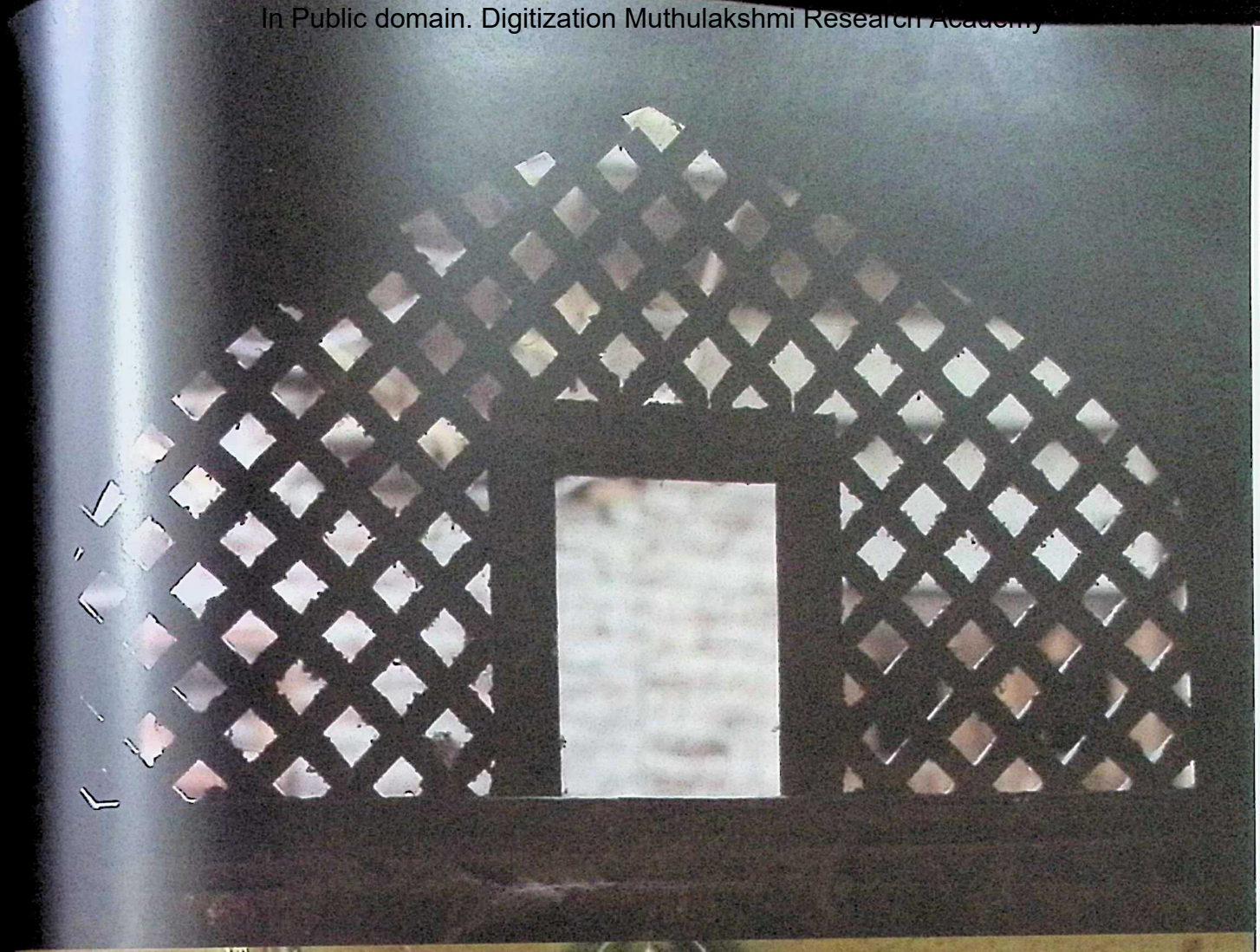

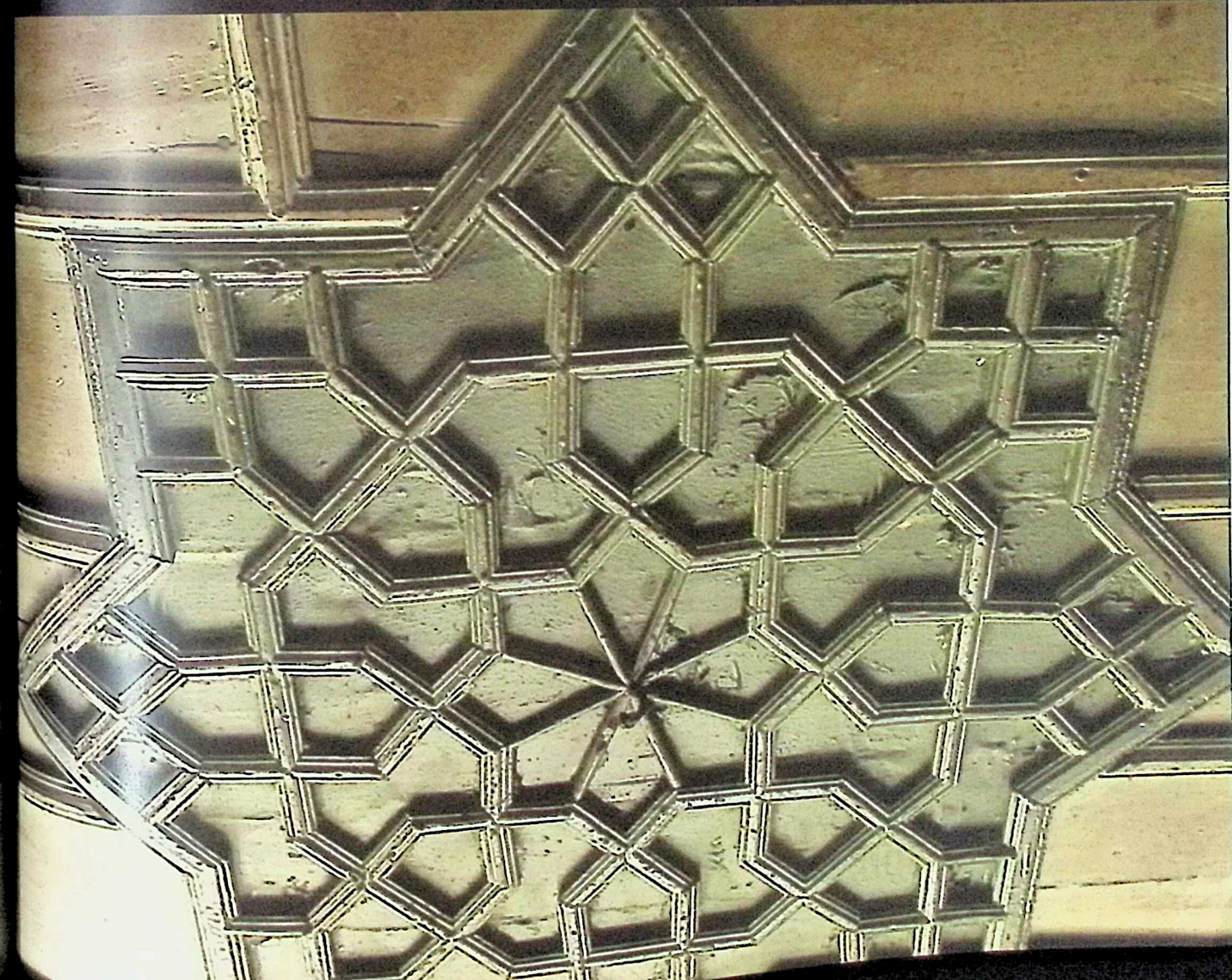

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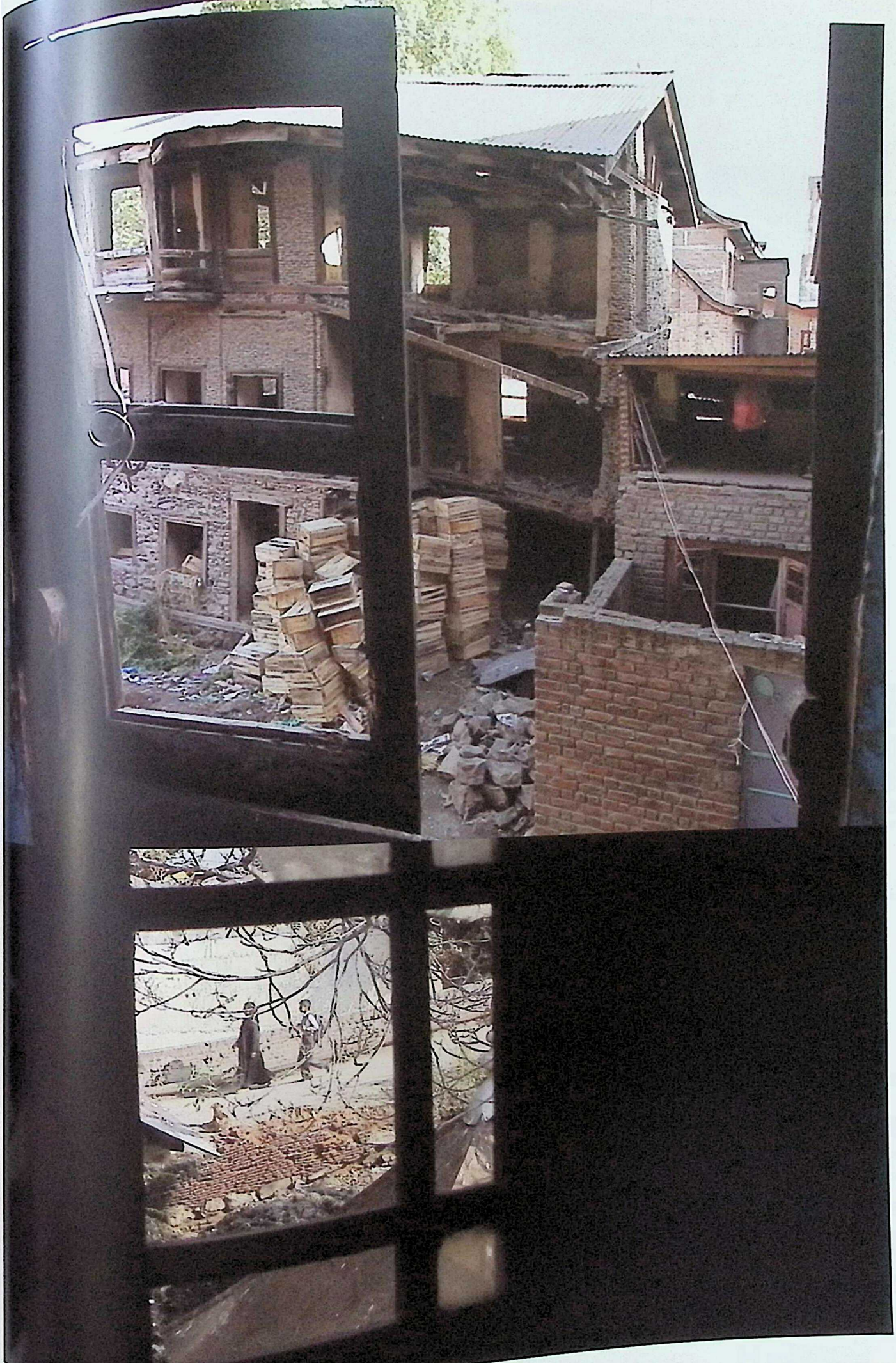

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Shohini Ghosh is Professor at the AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She made the documentary *Tales of the Night Fairies* (2002) on sex workers' rights and authored the monograph *Fire: A Queer Classic* (2010). Ghosh's current research is on violence, action and affect in Bombay popular cinema.

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Ruchir Joshi is a Kolkata-based filmmaker and writer. He has also worked as a freelance columnist and essayist since the early 1980s. His major publications are the novel *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* (2001) and *Poriborton—An Election Diary* (2011) on the state elections in West Bengal. In 2009, he edited *Electric Feather*, a collection of contemporary Indian erotic writing.

Amar Kanwar lives and works in New Delhi. His recent solo exhibitions have been at the Tate Modern and the Minneapolis Institute of Art. He has participated in documenta11, 12, 13 and 14 (2002, 2007, 2012, 2017). He is the recipient of the Prince Claus Award 2017; Annenberg Prize for Art and Social Change 2014; Munch Award for Contemporary Art, Norway, 2005; Golden Gate Award, San Francisco International Film Festival, 1999; and Golden Conch, Mumbai International Film Festival, 1998.

Rahul Roy is a filmmaker whose body of work stands at the cross-section of the city, labour and men's lives and includes several documentaries and two fiction films on South Asia. He has authored a graphic book on masculinities—*A Little Book on Men* (2007)—and has co-edited (with Dr Deepak Mehta) *Violence and the Quest for Justice in South Asia* (2018).

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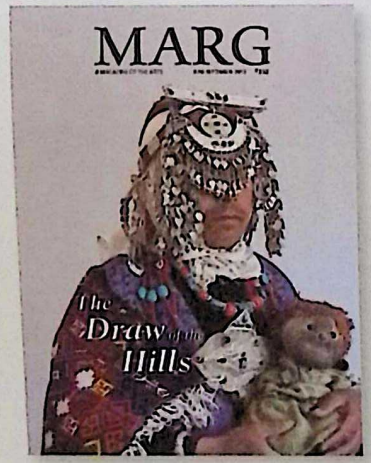

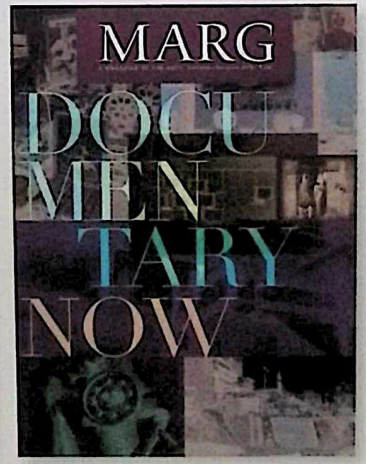

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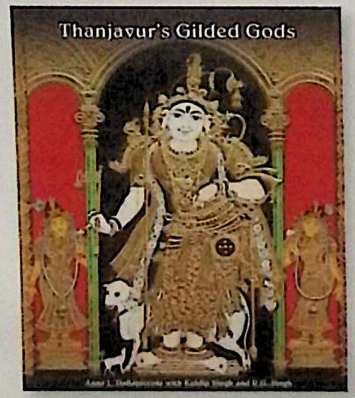

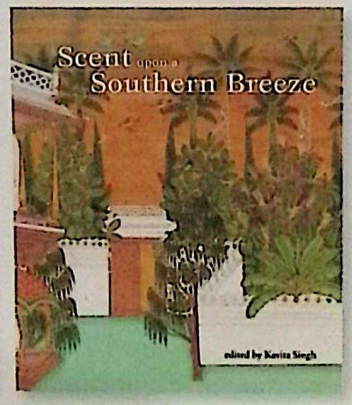

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Surabhi Sharma studied film direction at the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, and made her first film in 2001. She has worked on 10 documentaries apart from short fiction and video installations. Her key concern has been documenting cities in transition through the lens of labour, music, migration, and most recently reproductive labour.

Sameera Jain has been working with cinema for over three decades—as an editor, filmmaker, teacher and juror among other engagements. She is a mentor to film students and filmmakers across diverse platforms, including her alma mater, Film and Television Institute of India, Pune. She conceptualized and directs the Creative Documentary course at Sri Aurobindo Centre for Arts and Communication, New Delhi.

Ishita Tiwary is a PhD student at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is the recipient of a Fulbright Doctoral Fellowship. Her work has been published in *Bioscope: South Asian Screen Studies*, *Post Script: Essays in Film and Humanities* and *The Pirate Book* amongst others.

Shaunak Sen is a filmmaker, artist and researcher based in New Delhi. He directed the film *Cities of Sleep* (2015). He looks at digital forms like the sting, the MMS, GPS technologies—and their movement through Hindi cinema.

Anuja Jain is a Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of St Andrews, UK. She is co-editor of *The Poetics of Indian Cinema* (*Screen*, 2017). She is completing a monograph on representations of sectarian violence in Indian documentary cinema. She has written for *The Velvet Light Trap* and *South Asian Popular Culture*.

Pallavi Paul is a PhD student at School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and a multimedia practitioner. Her research is on the enmeshment of truth and image practices. As a contemporary artist, she works primarily with video and installation form. Her work has been shown at Bhau Daji Lad Museum, KHOJ International Artists' Association and several international festivals and art galleries. Her films have been screened at Experimenta, TENT, Beirut Art Centre, Mumbai Film Festival and 100 Years of Experimentation in Film and Video (organized by Films Division, India).

Sonal Jain and Mriganka Madhukaillya have collaborated as Desire Machine Collective since 2004. They work at the intersection of art, ecology, technology and activism. Their practice spans film, video, photography, digital media, public intervention, curation and writing. They have displayed their installations in a variety of public spaces, from remote parts of Assam to international museums.

Subasri Krishnan is a filmmaker who heads the Media Lab at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru, where she curates the Urban Lens Film Festival. Her well-acclaimed films include: *Brave New Medium* (2010) on internet censorship in Southeast Asia; *This or That Particular Person* (2012) on the idea of official identity documents; and *What The Fields Remember* (2015) on the 1983 Nellie massacre in Assam. She was Festival Director of the IAWRT (International Association of Women in Radio and Television) film festival in 2017.

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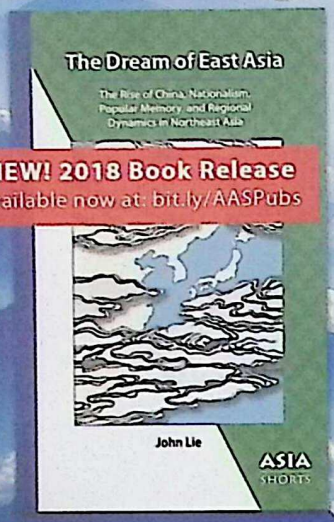

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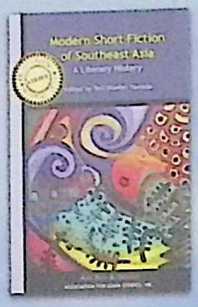

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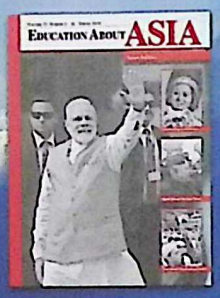

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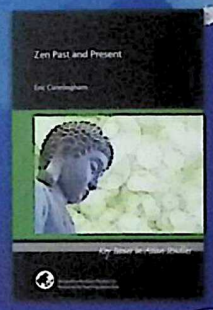

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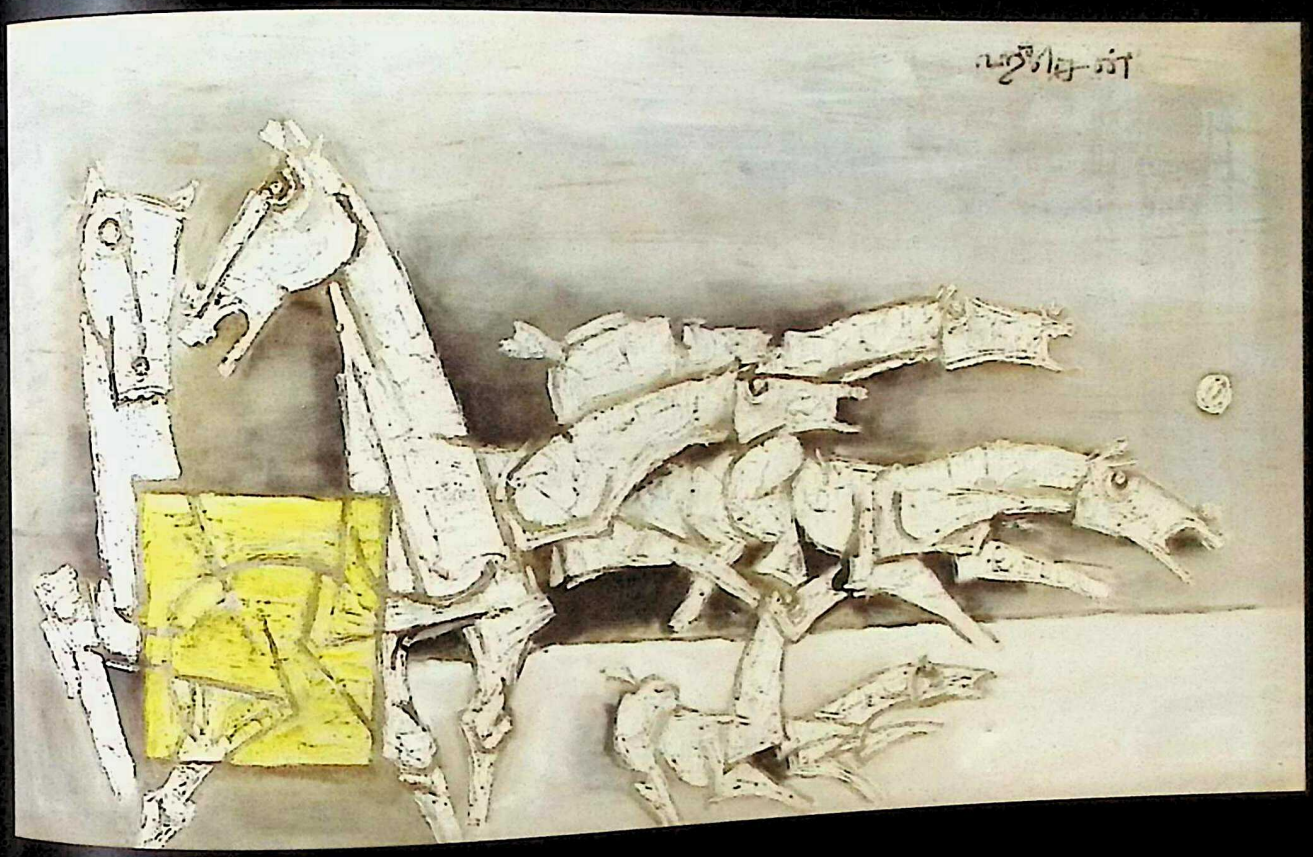

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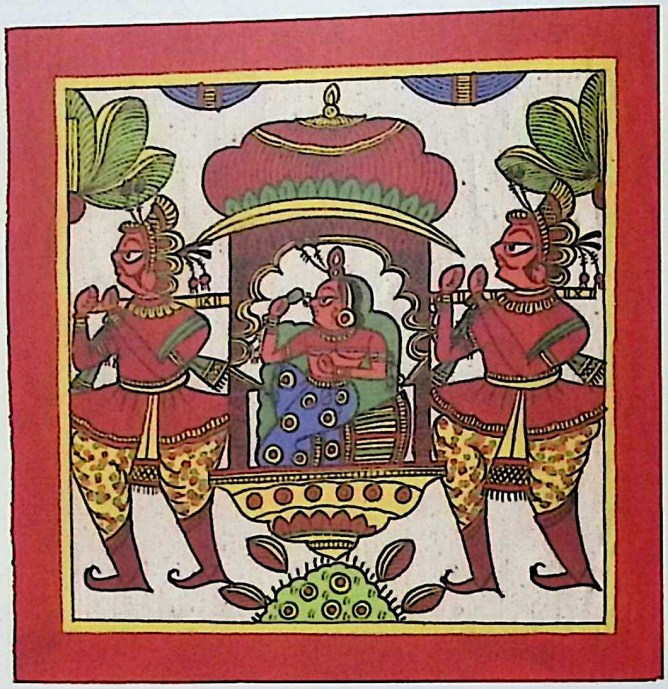

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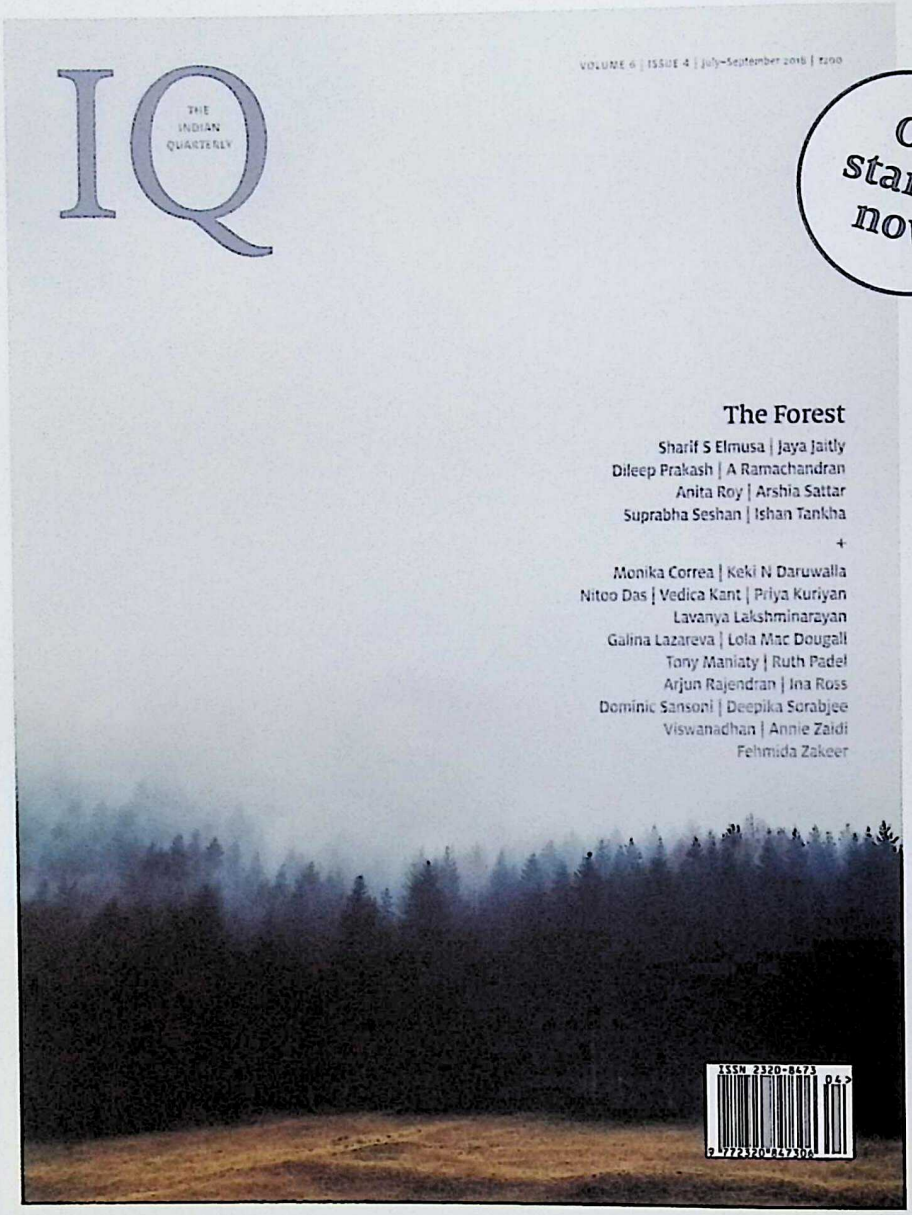

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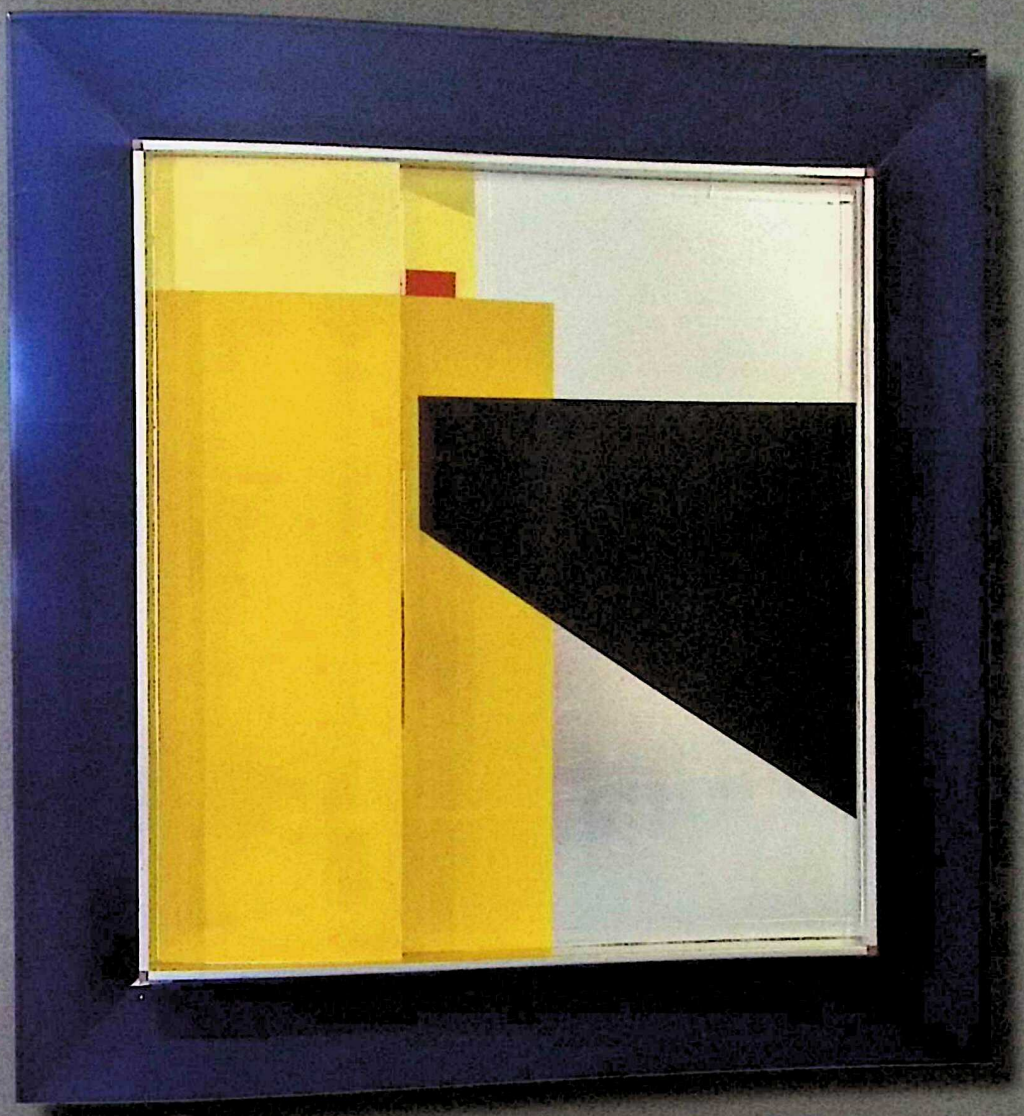

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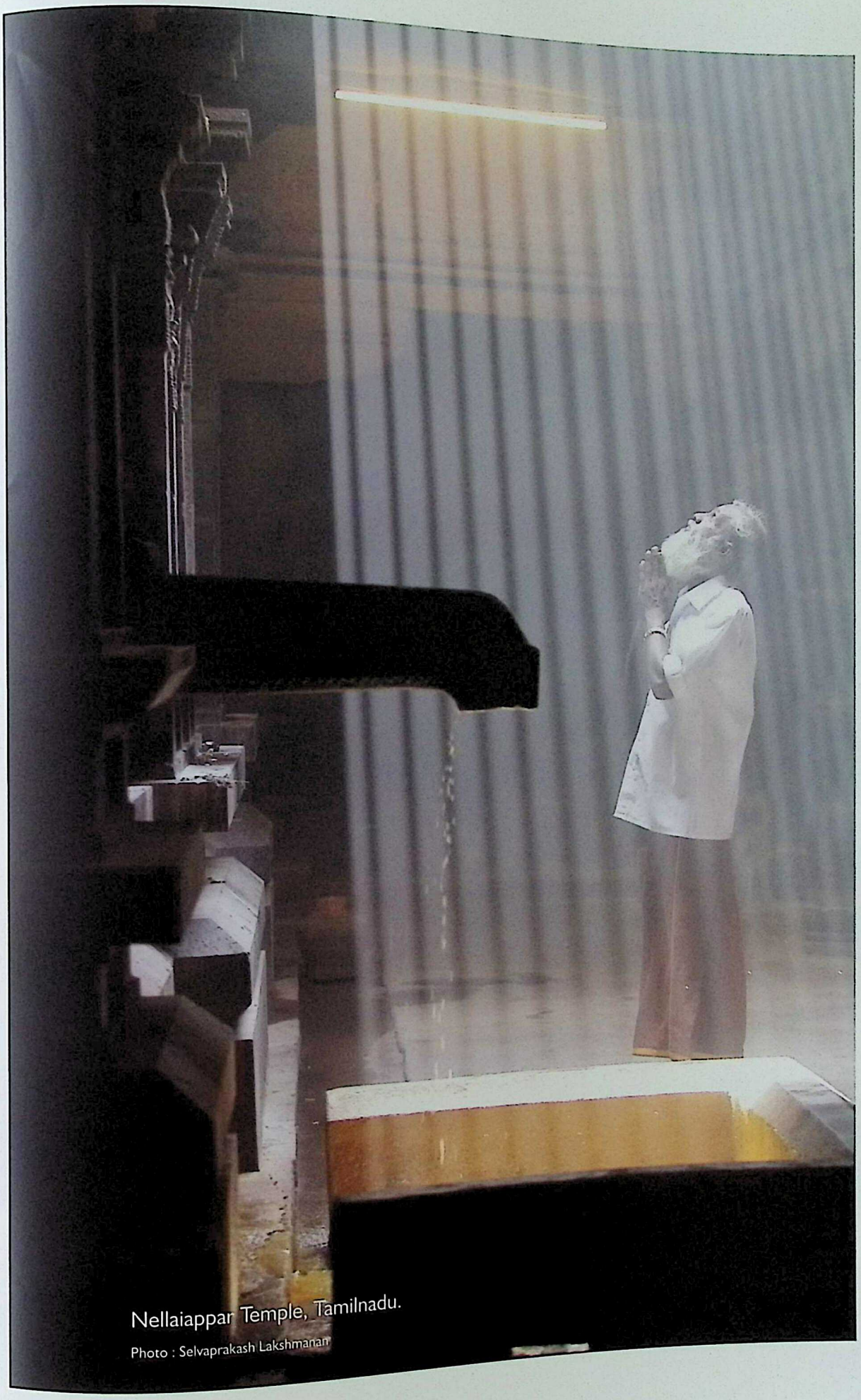

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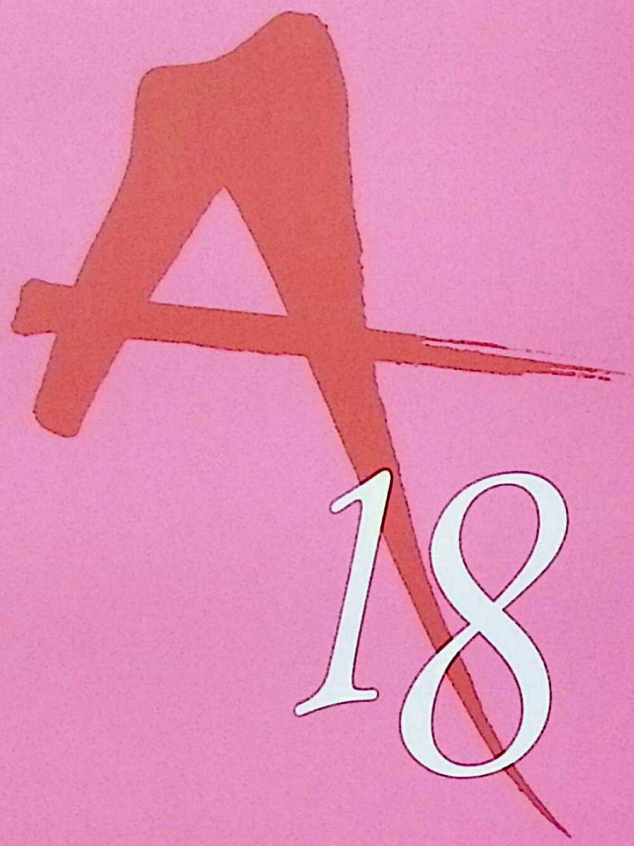

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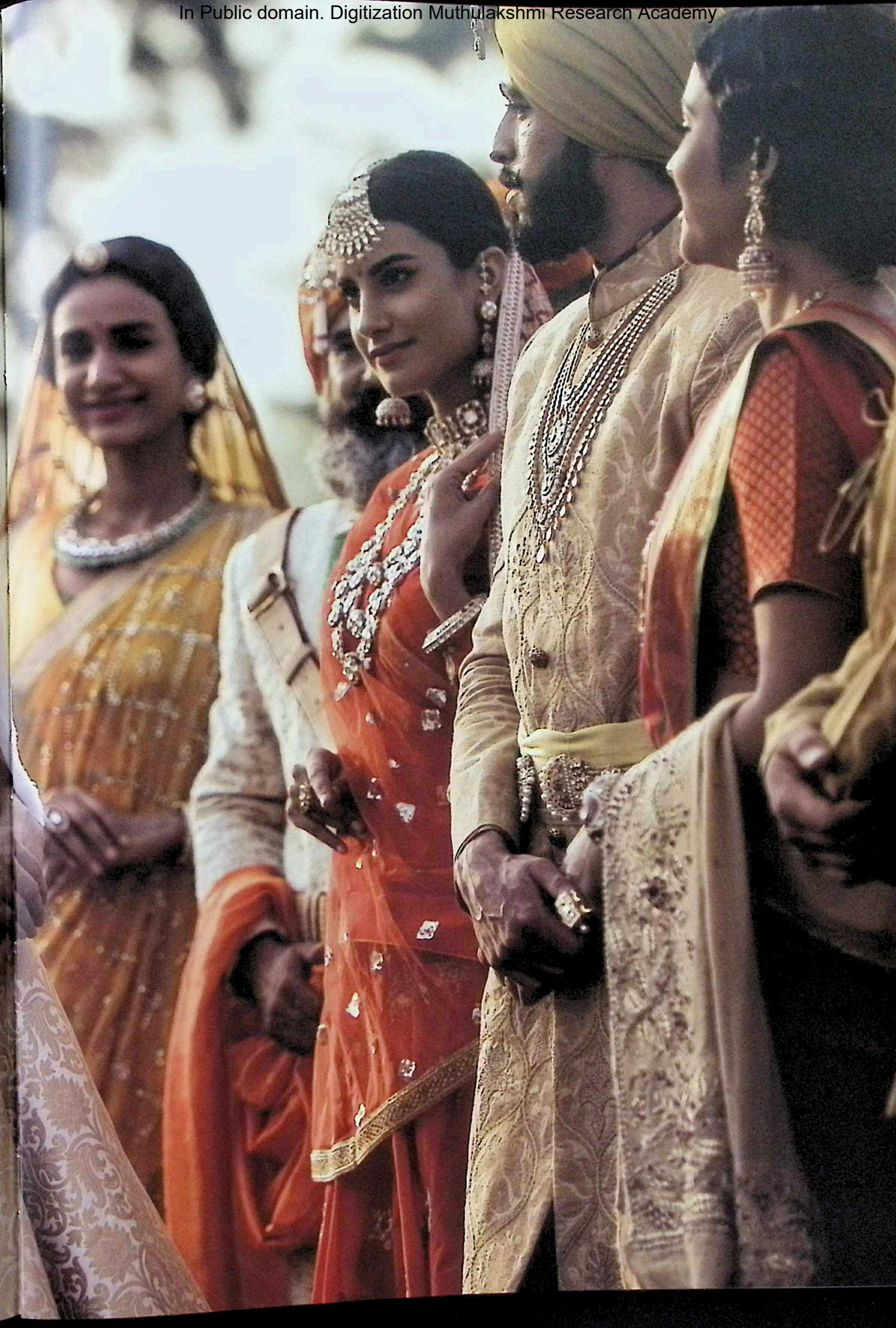

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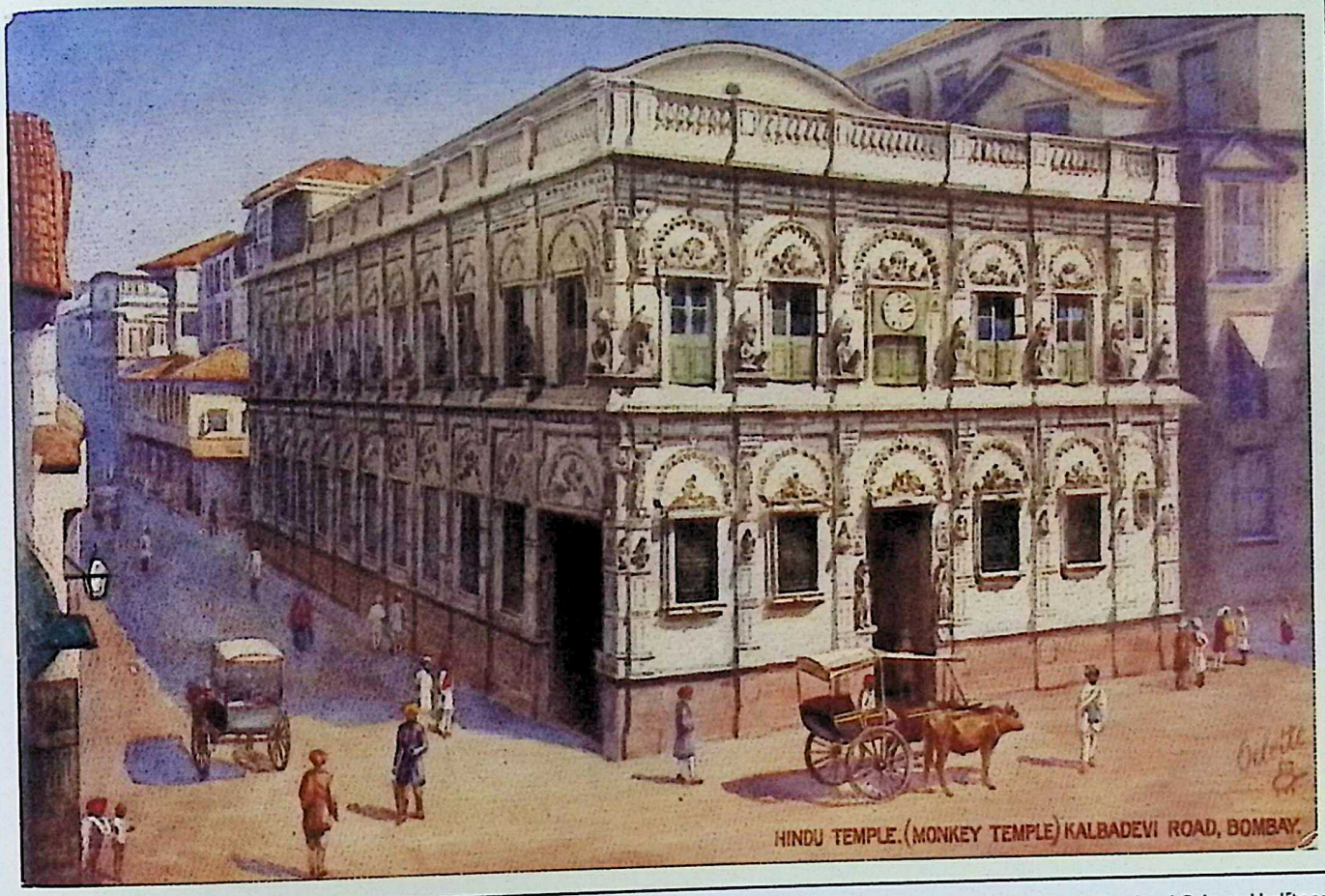

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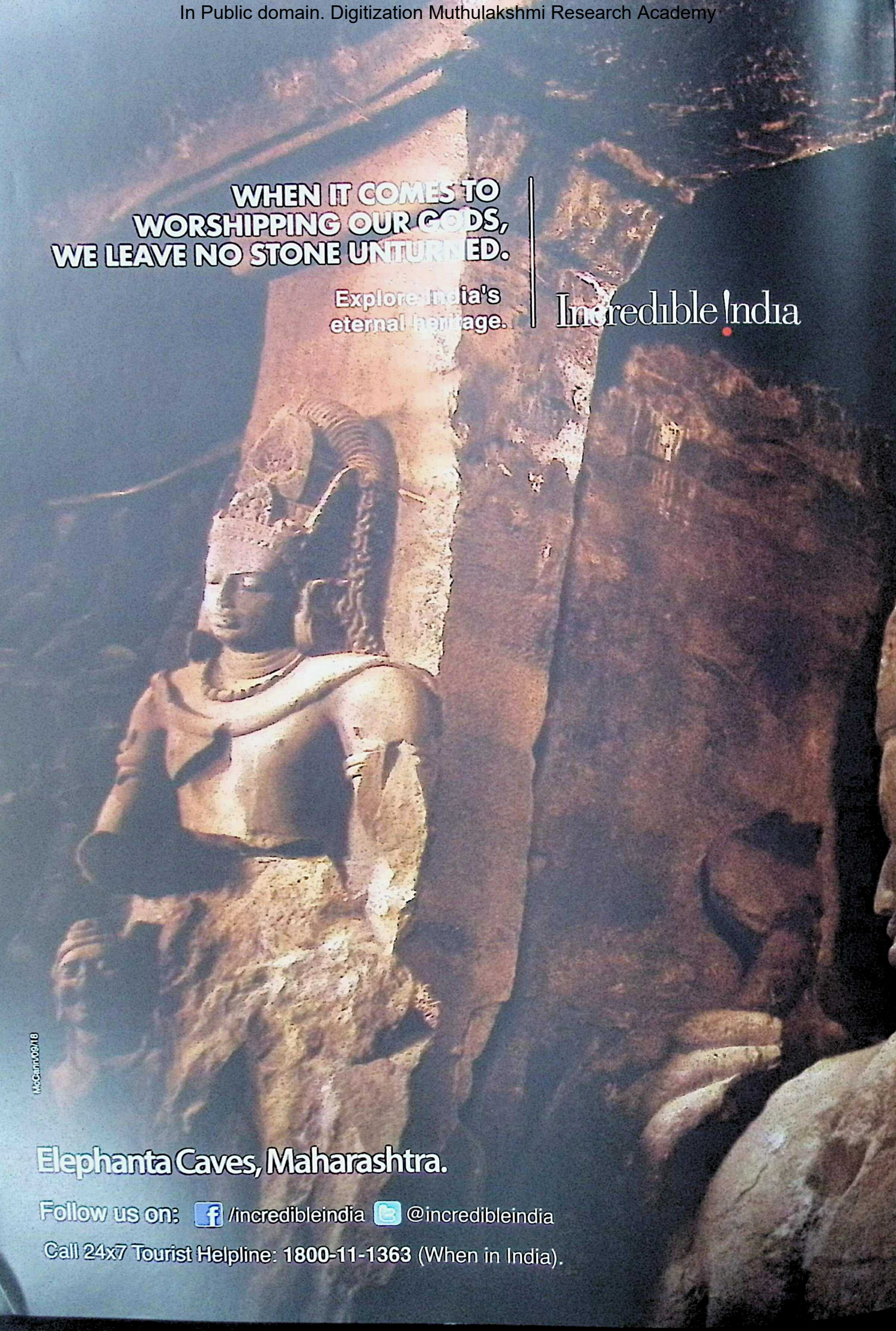

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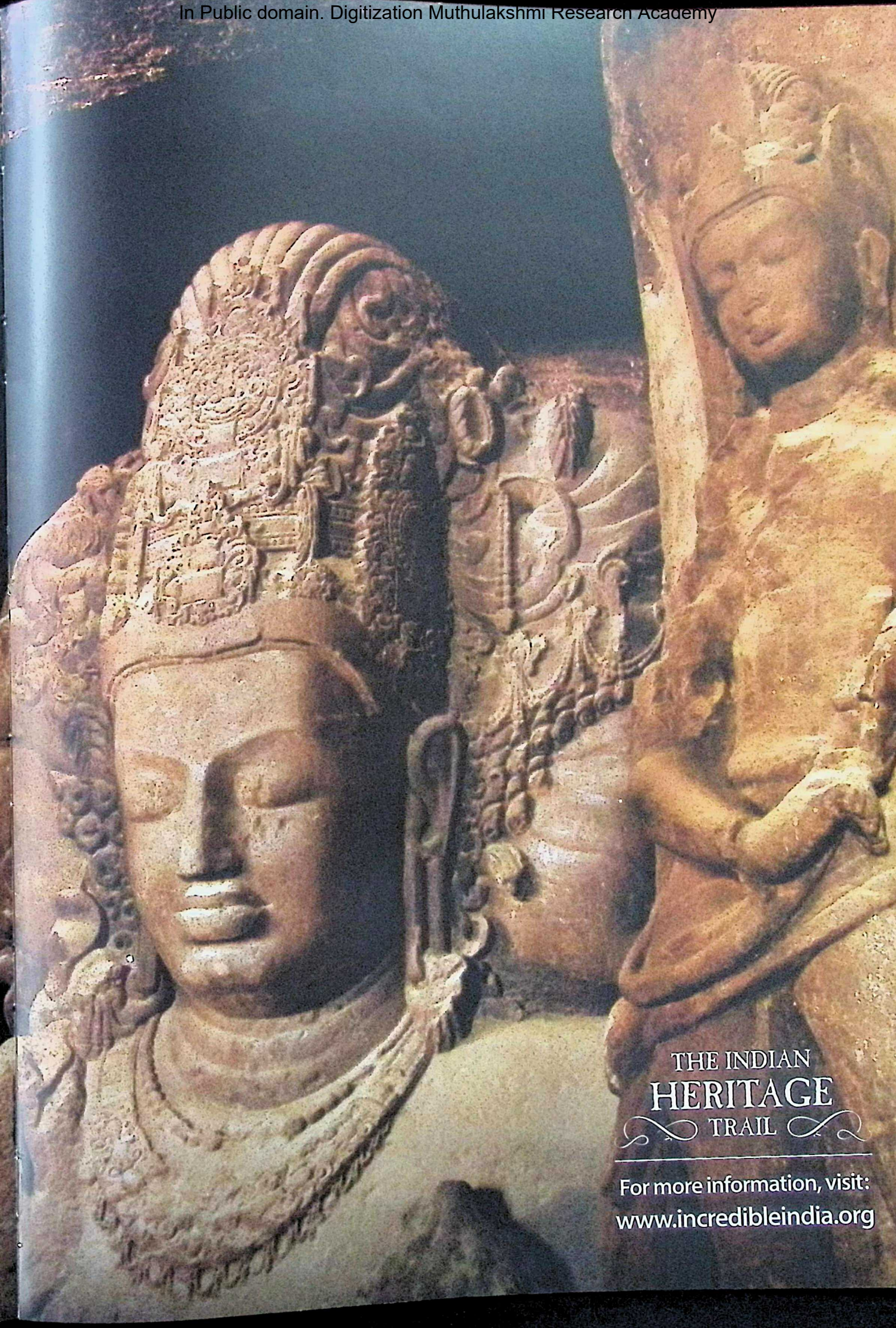

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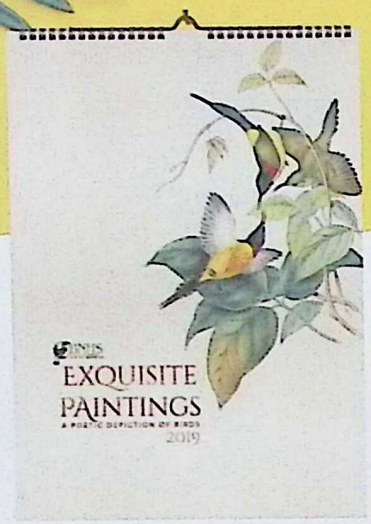

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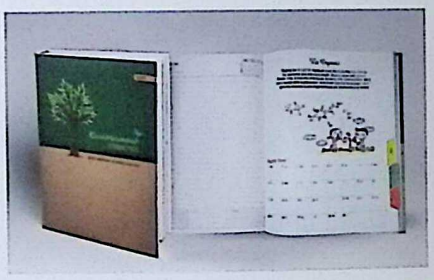

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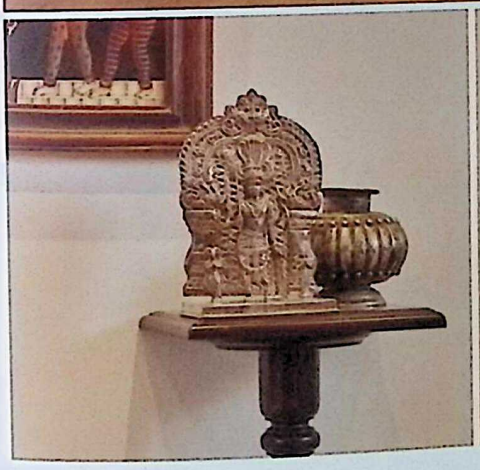

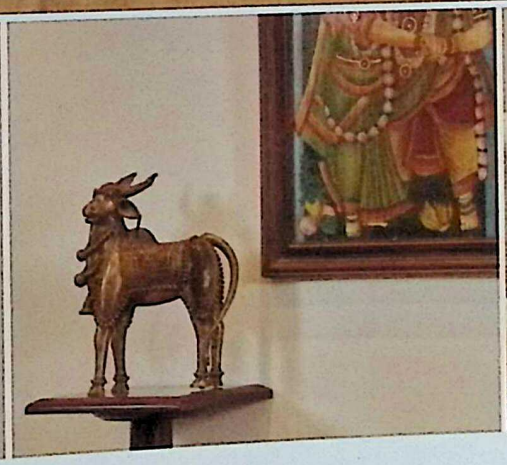

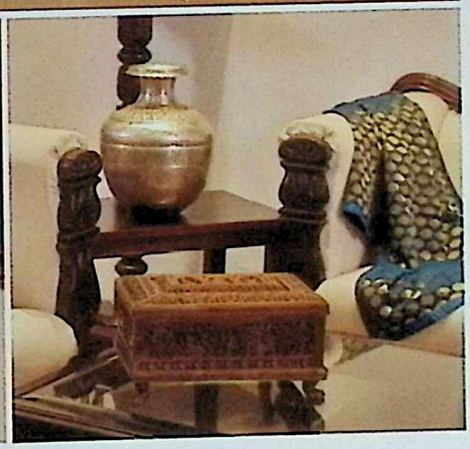

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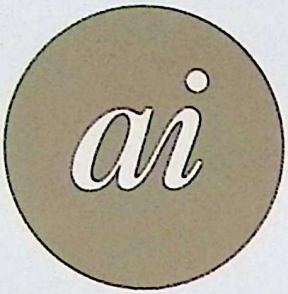

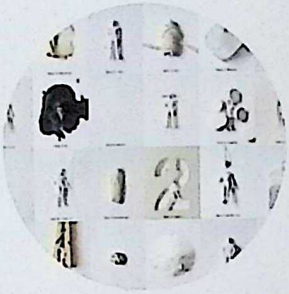

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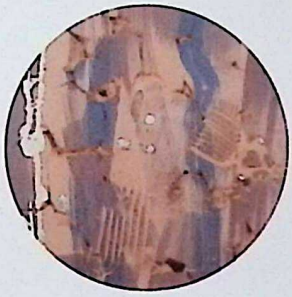

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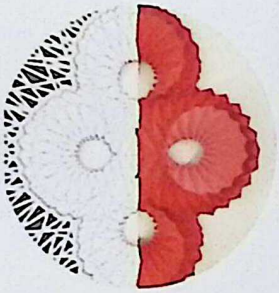
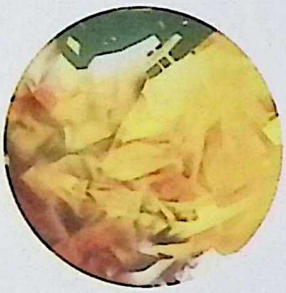


DESIGN & ART
COVER ART: ANKON MITRA

MYTHOLOGY
COVER ART: SEEMA KOHLI



FIVE
COVER ART: SUDIP ROY

REVERSE
COVER ART: MADHVI PAREKH

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15% low Sodium#

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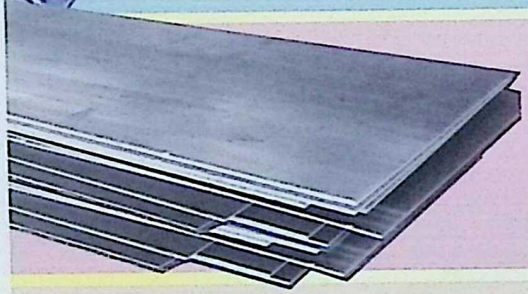

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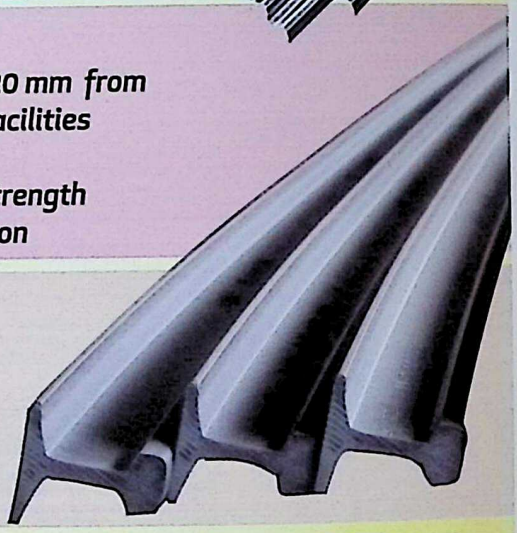

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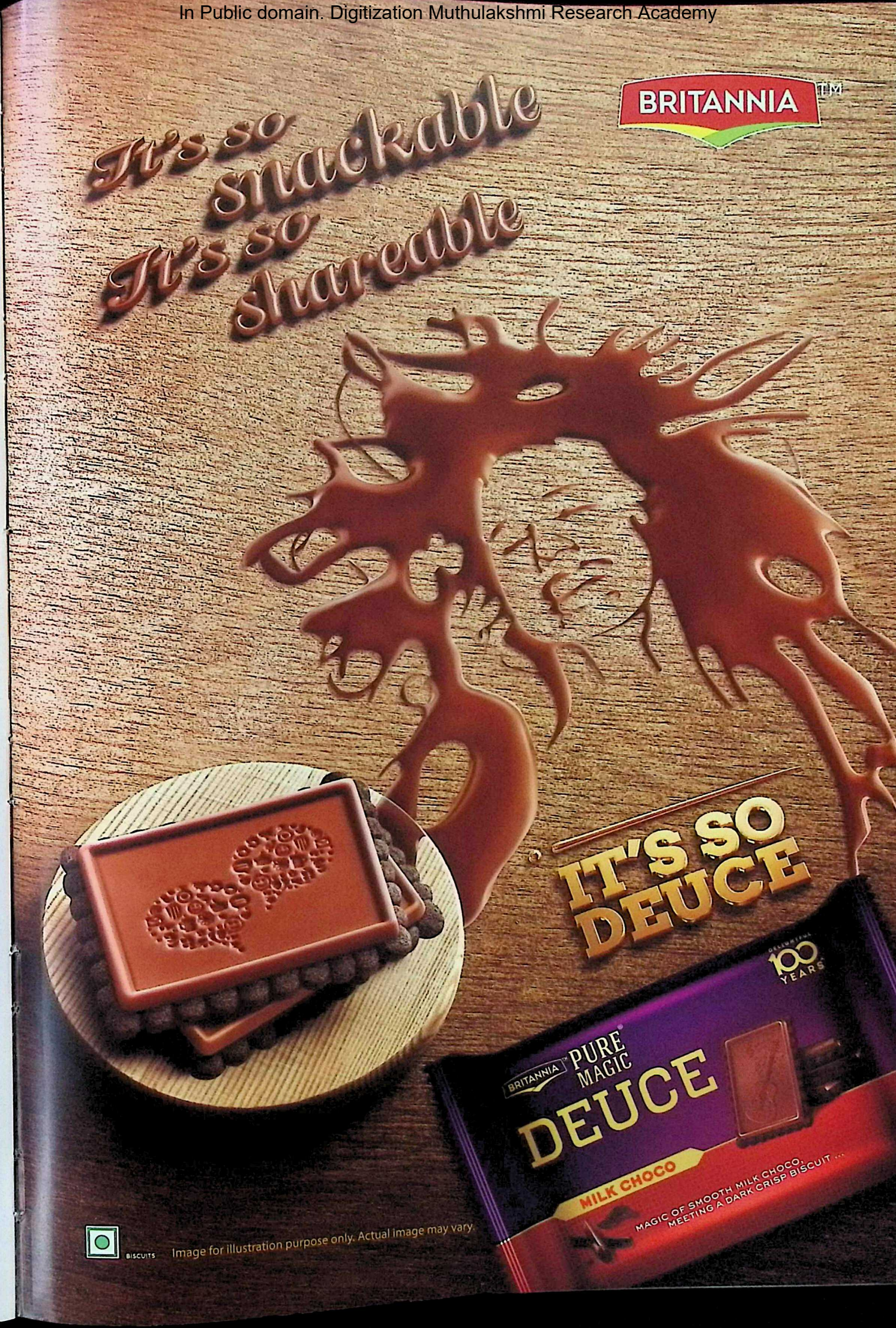

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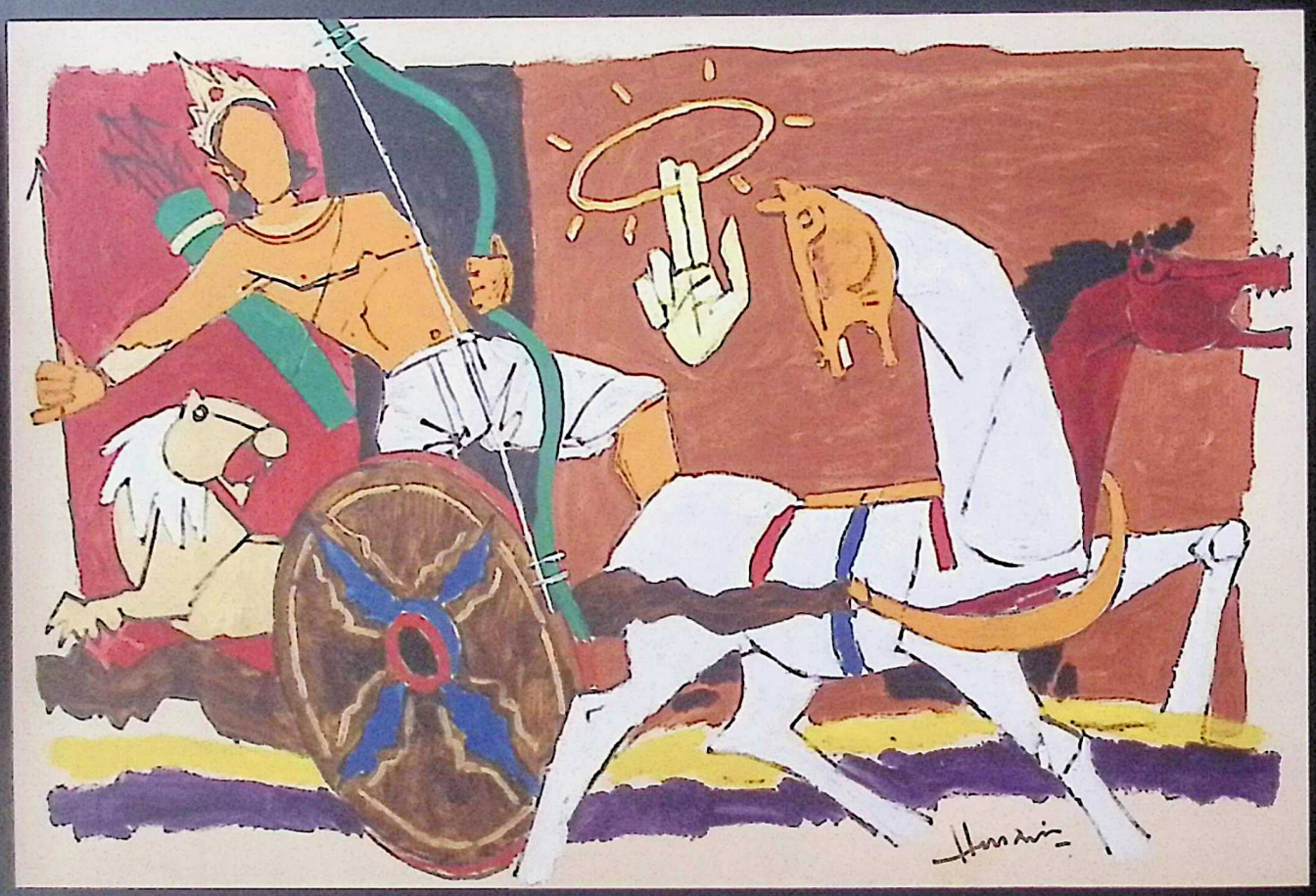
SOUTH ASIAN ART

CLASSICAL, MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY

ONLINE AUCTION

(NO BUYER'S PREMIUM)

NOVEMBER 2018



M.F. Husain — Untitled (Arjuna and Krishna)

A sale of classical, modern and contemporary paintings and sculptures from the Indian subcontinent

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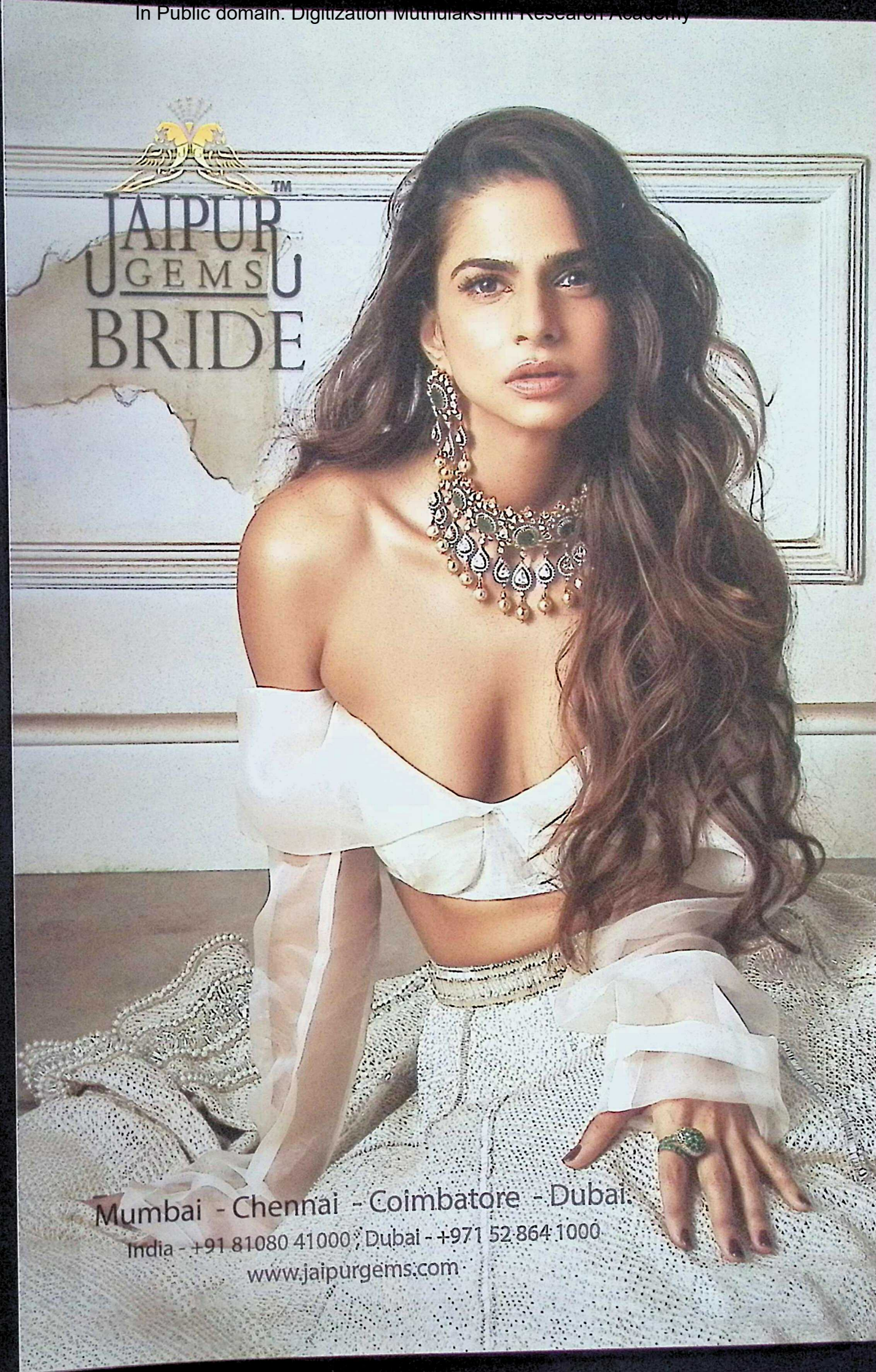

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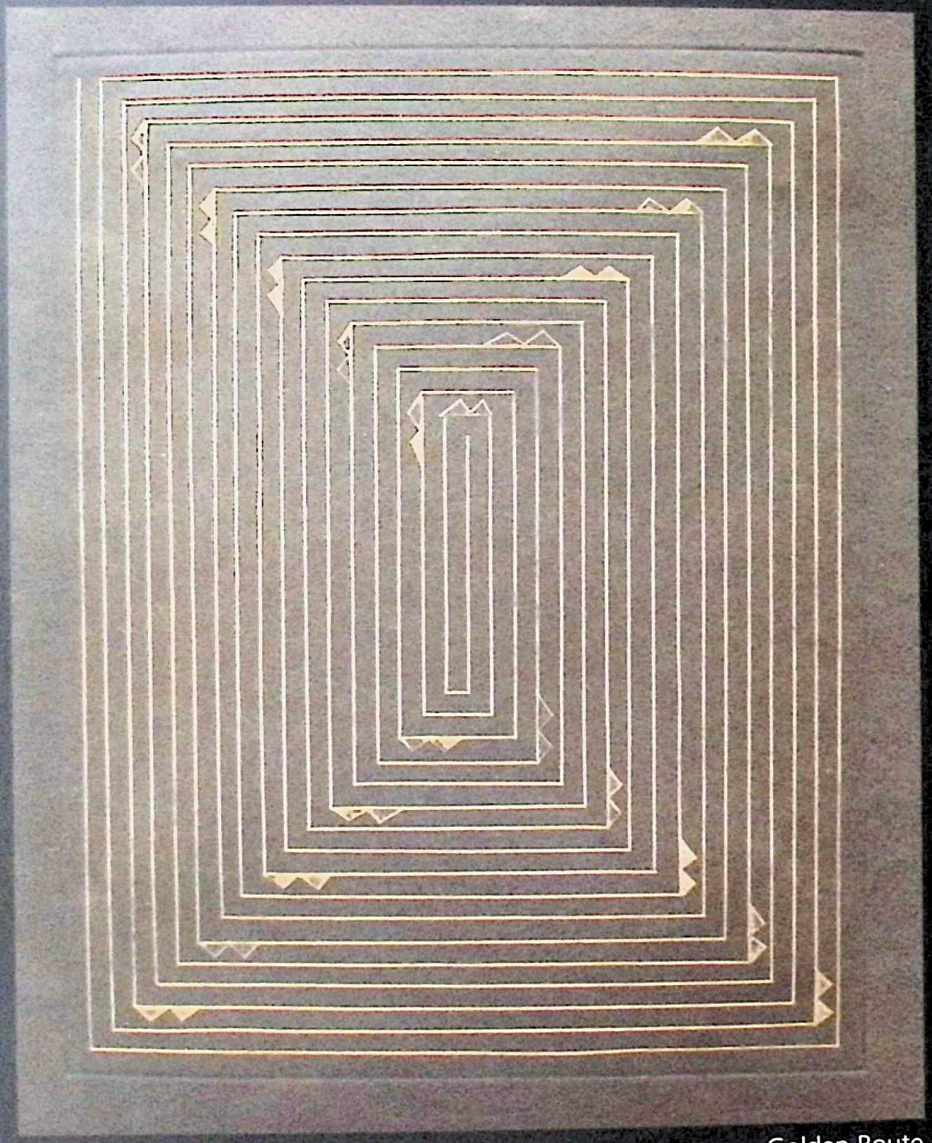
PRINTS AND MULTIPLES

ONLINE AUCTION
(NO BUYER'S PREMIUM)
2019



Zarina Hashmi — Golden Route

The Prints and Multiples sale will comprise works executed in various printmaking techniques and three-dimensional multiples.

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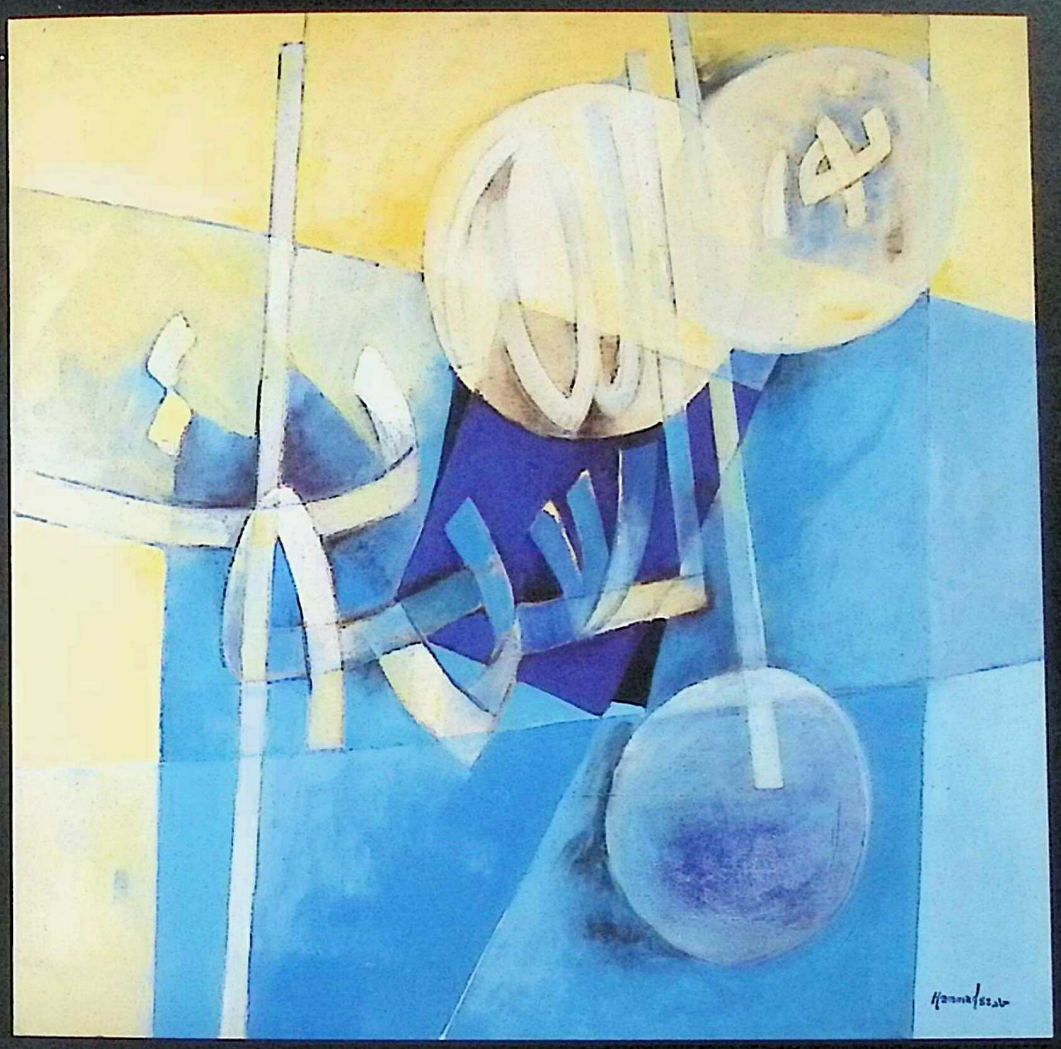

Mahmoud Hammad — Untitled

Art Beyond Borders is an eclectic sale comprising works by established and mid-career artists across regions, focused on cross-pollination of art.

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